VIC TORRY AND HIS FLYING SAUCER

10¢

REVEALED AT LAST!

THE MOST INCREDIBLE STORY OF MODERN TIMES!

The FLYING SAUCER

Chapter One — The Captive Planet

Starring Vic Torry

From out of the veiled, unknowable infinity of space itself -- beyond the farthest reaches where the men of Earth have ventured, came a whirling, flashing, silver object! An awesome spectacle! A thing of terror, of mystery! ... A FLYING SAUCER!

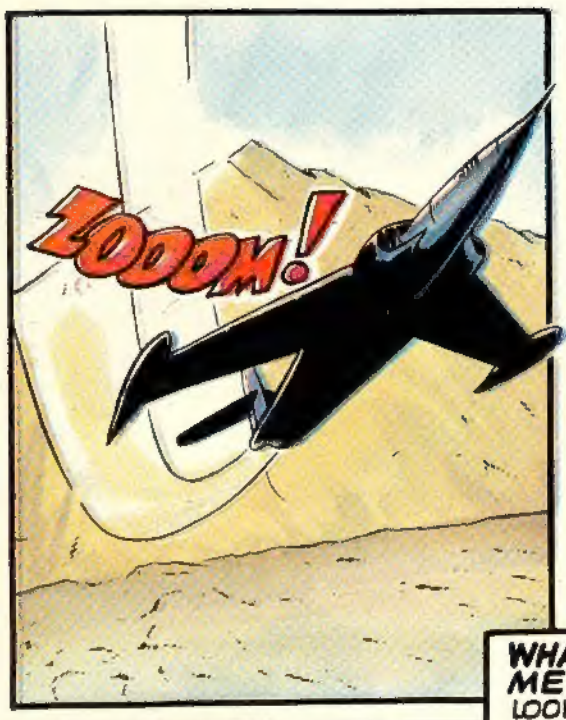
Vic Torry, Ace Test Pilot, and his aviation-enthusiast girlfriend, Laura, test a new jet plane over the hill country of southern California ---

SHE'S GOT THE SPEED, VIC, BUT I'M WONDERING HOW SHE'LL HOLD UP UNDER STRESS!

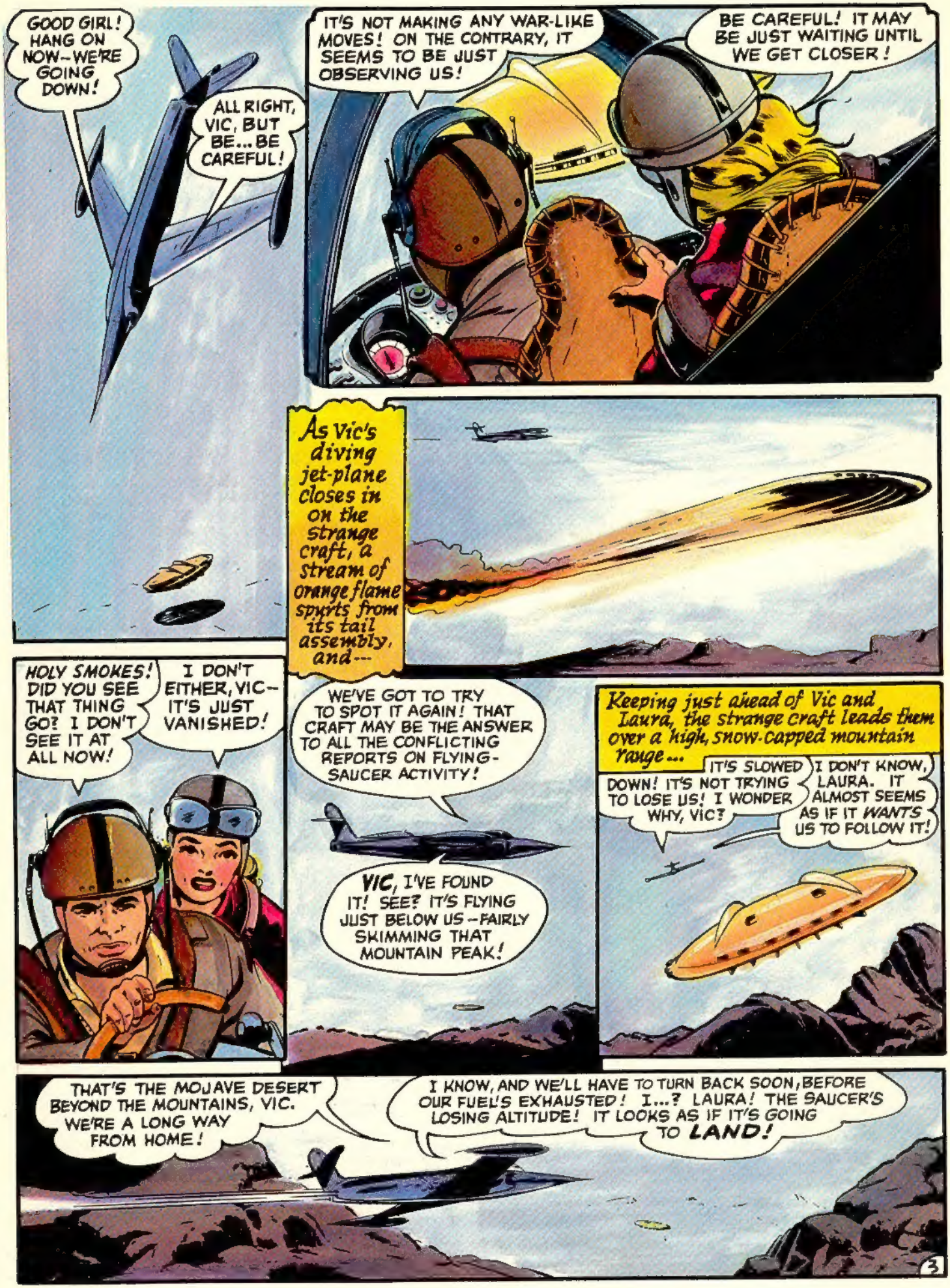
THAT'S WHAT WE'RE UP HERE TO FIND OUT, LAURA! HANG ON NOW -- I'M GOING TO POWER-DIVE, AND PUT HER THROUGH HER PACES!

VIC -- WILL YOU BE ABLE TO PULL HER OUT OF IT?

DON'T WORRY, LAURA! THIS PLANE CAN STAND PLENTY OF STRAIN!



Following the direction of Laura's pointing finger, Vic catches sight of the strange, saucer-like craft, and a chill feeling of disbelief and awe sweeps over him---


GOOD GIRL! HANG ON NOW—WE'RE GOING DOWN!
ALL RIGHT, VIC, BUT BE... BE CAREFUL!
IT'S NOT MAKING ANY WAR-LIKE MOVES! ON THE CONTRARY, IT SEEMS TO BE JUST OBSERVING US!
BE CAREFUL! IT MAY BE JUST WAITING UNTIL WE GET CLOSER!
As Vic's diving jet-plane closes in on the strange craft, a stream of orange flame spurts from its tail assembly, and---
HOLY SMOKES! DID YOU SEE THAT THING GO? I DON'T SEE IT AT ALL NOW!
I DON'T EITHER, VIC—IT'S JUST VANISHED!
WE'VE GOT TO TRY TO SPOT IT AGAIN! THAT CRAFT MAY BE THE ANSWER TO ALL THE CONFLICTING REPORTS ON FLYING-SAUCER ACTIVITY!
VIC, I'VE FOUND IT! SEE? IT'S FLYING JUST BELOW US—FAIRLY SKIMMING THAT MOUNTAIN PEAK!
Keeping just ahead of Vic and Laura, the strange craft leads them over a high, snow-capped mountain range...
IT'S SLOWED DOWN! IT'S NOT TRYING TO LOSE US! I WONDER WHY, VIC?
I DON'T KNOW, LAURA. IT ALMOST SEEMS AS IF IT WANTS US TO FOLLOW IT!
THAT'S THE MOJAVE DESERT BEYOND THE MOUNTAINS, VIC. WE'RE A LONG WAY FROM HOME!
I KNOW, AND WE'LL HAVE TO TURN BACK SOON, BEFORE OUR FUEL'S EXHAUSTED! I...? LAURA! THE SAUCER'S LOSING ALTITUDE! IT LOOKS AS IF IT'S GOING TO LAND!
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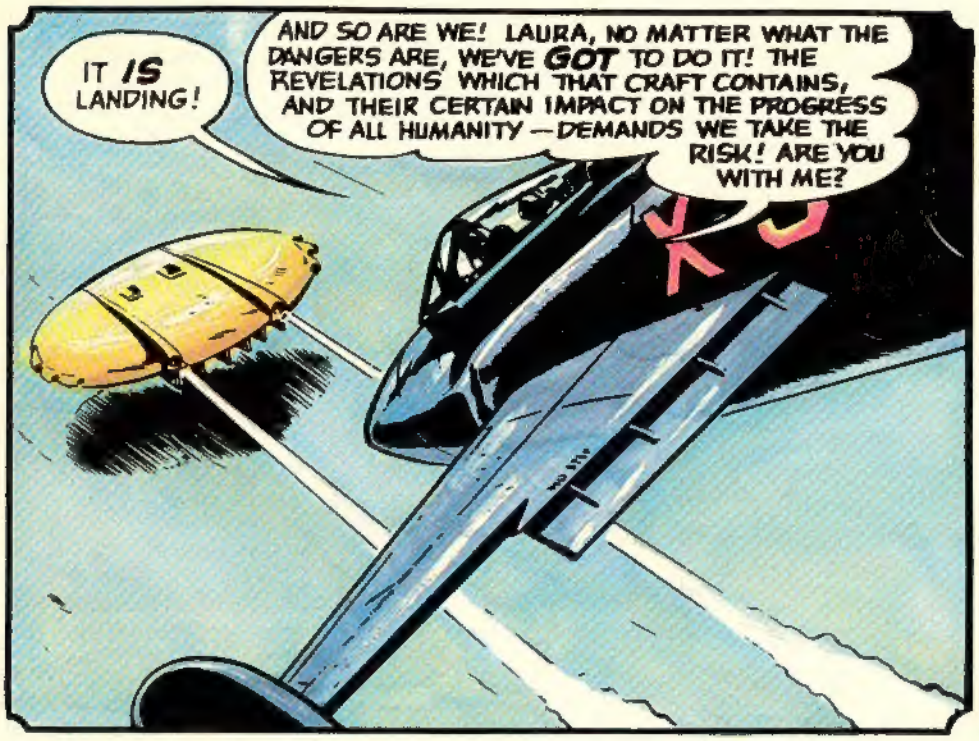
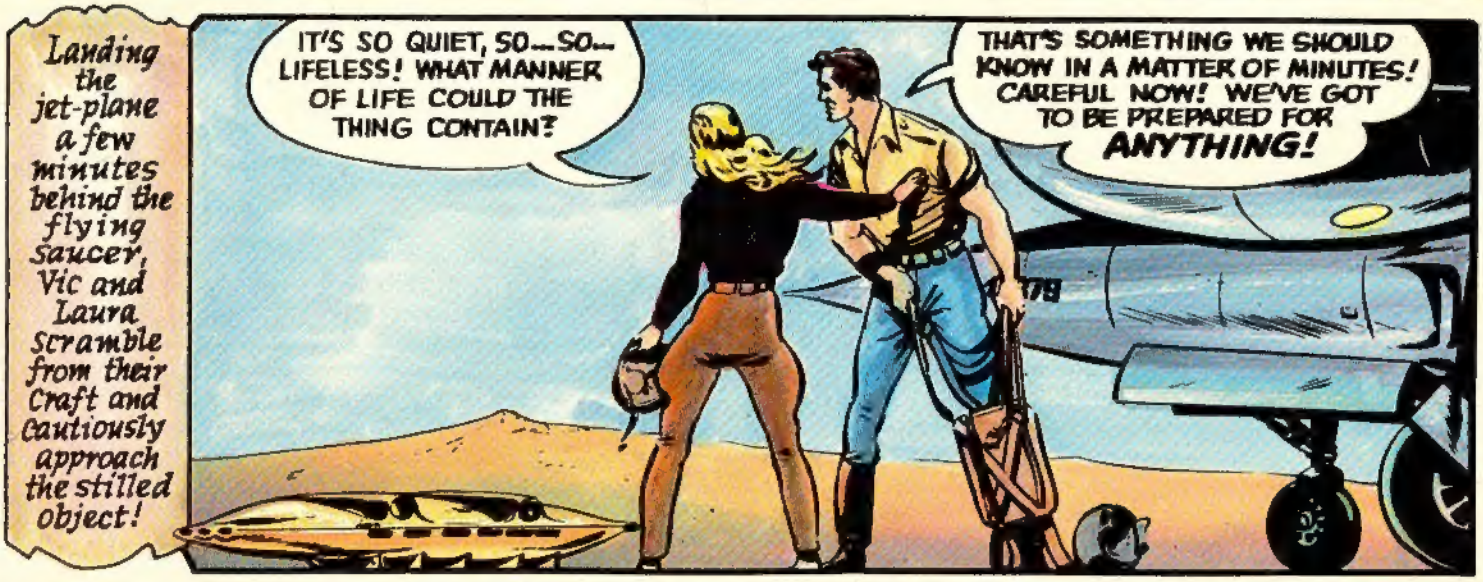
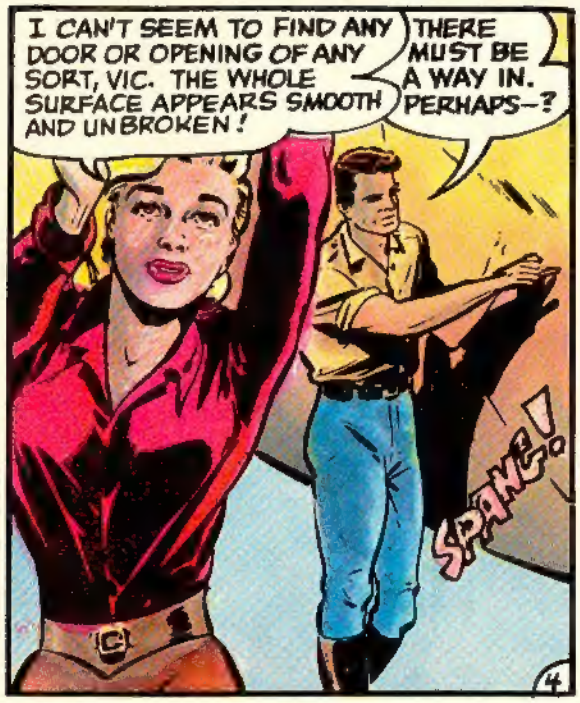

IT IS LANDING!
AND SO ARE WE! LAURA, NO MATTER WHAT THE DANGERS ARE, WE'VE GOT TO DO IT! THE REVELATIONS WHICH THAT CRAFT CONTAINS, AND THEIR CERTAIN IMPACT ON THE PROGRESS OF ALL HUMANITY—DEMANDS WE TAKE THE RISK! ARE YOU WITH ME?

YOU KNOW I AM, VIC!
THANKS, LAURA! I KNEW YOU'D UNDERSTAND!


Landing the jet-plane a few minutes behind the flying saucer, Vic and Laura scramble from their craft and cautiously approach the stilled object!
IT'S SO QUIET, SO...SO... LIFELESS! WHAT MANNER OF LIFE COULD THE THING CONTAIN?
THAT'S SOMETHING WE SHOULD KNOW IN A MATTER OF MINUTES! CAREFUL NOW! WE'VE GOT TO BE PREPARED FOR ANYTHING!


I CAN'T SEEM TO FIND ANY DOOR OR OPENING OF ANY SORT, VIC. THE WHOLE SURFACE APPEARS SMOOTH AND UNBROKEN!
THERE MUST BE A WAY IN. PERHAPS—?
SPANG!
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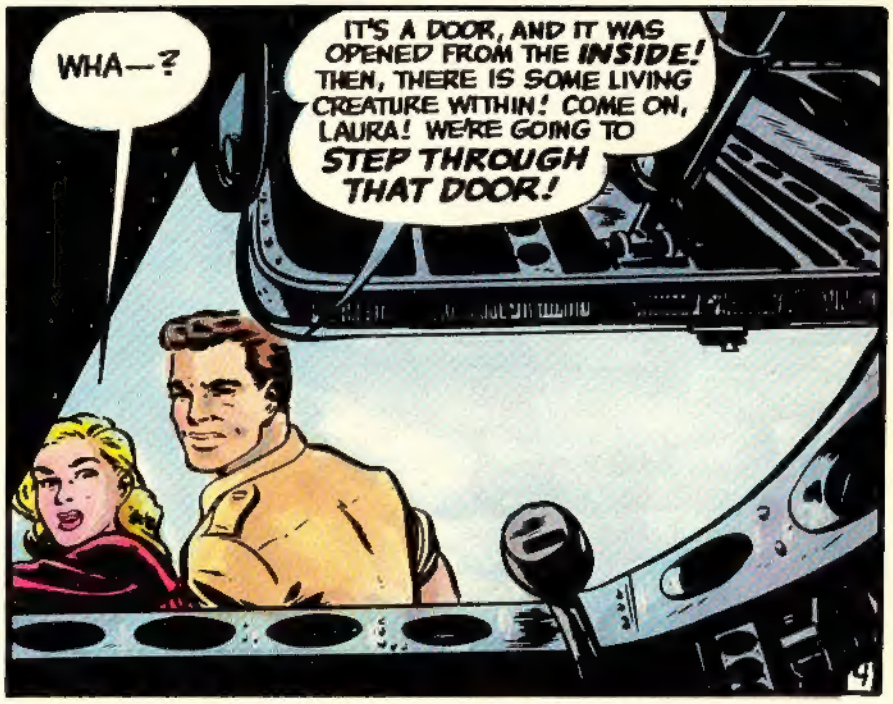
WHA—?
IT'S A DOOR, AND IT WAS OPENED FROM THE INSIDE! THEN, THERE IS SOME LIVING CREATURE WITHIN! COME ON, LAURA! WE'RE GOING TO STEP THROUGH THAT DOOR!
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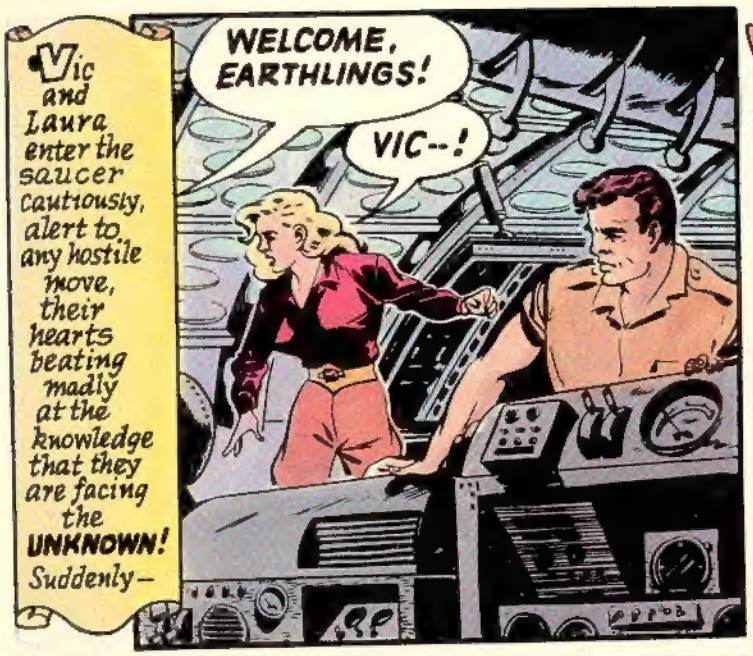
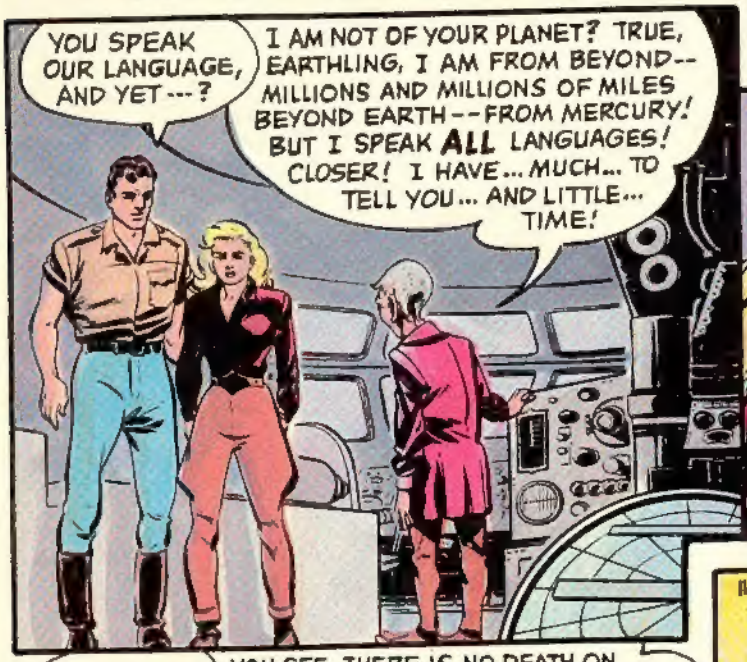
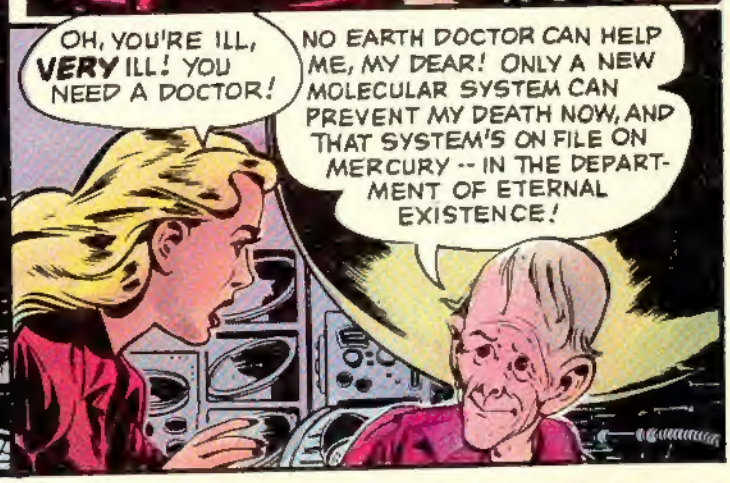
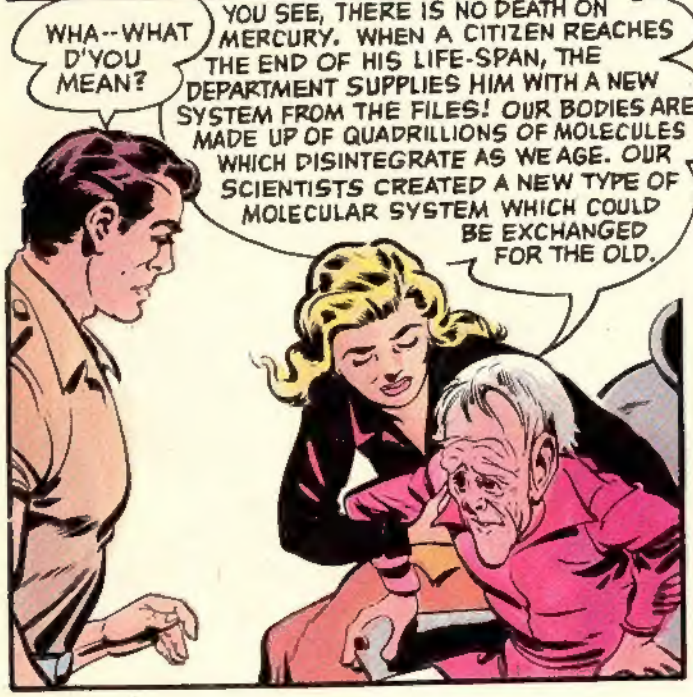

Vic and Laura enter the saucer cautiously, alert to any hostile move, their hearts beating madly at the knowledge that they are facing the UNKNOWN! Suddenly—
WELCOME, EARTHLINGS!
VIC--!

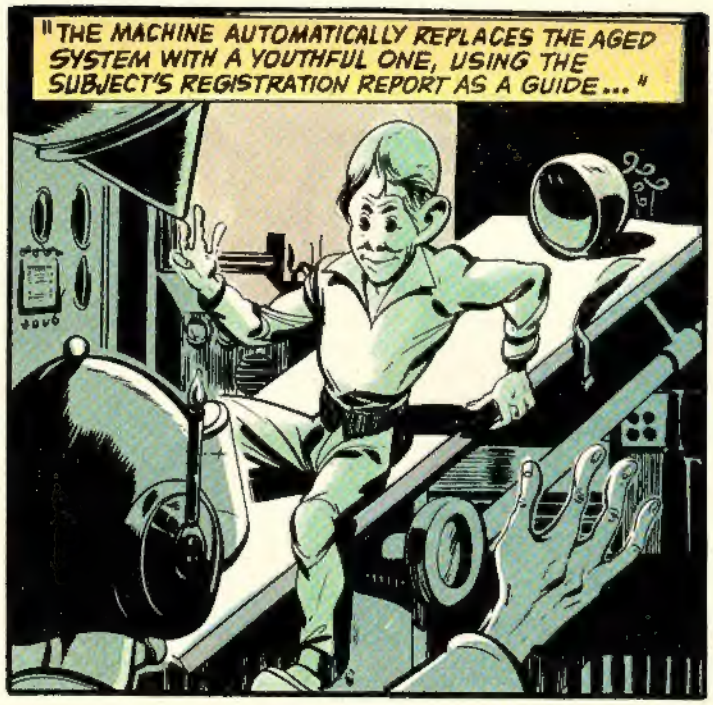
Whirling toward the thin, reedy voice, their nerves almost snapping from tension, Vic and Laura see ---
DON'T BE FRIGHTENED OF ME, EARTHLINGS. I COULDN'T HARM YOU IF I WISHED. COME CLOSER TO ME.


YOU SPEAK OUR LANGUAGE, AND YET ---?
I AM NOT OF YOUR PLANET? TRUE, EARTHLING, I AM FROM BEYOND-- MILLIONS AND MILLIONS OF MILES BEYOND EARTH--FROM MERCURY! BUT I SPEAK ALL LANGUAGES! CLOSER! I HAVE... MUCH... TO TELL YOU... AND LITTLE... TIME!

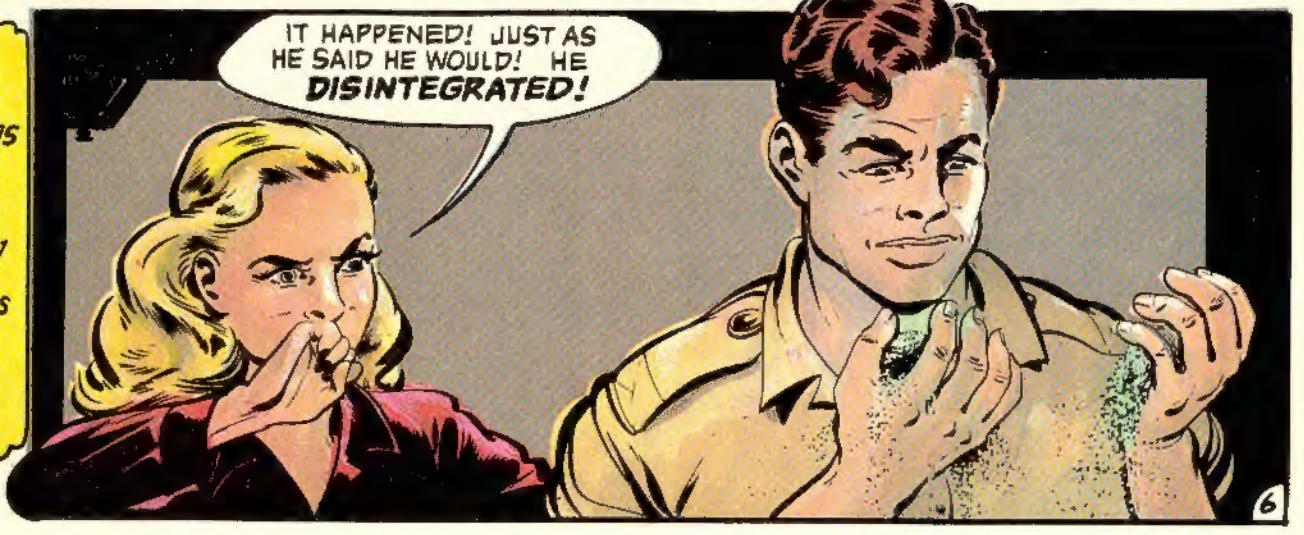

OH, YOU'RE ILL, VERY ILL! YOU NEED A DOCTOR!
NO EARTH DOCTOR CAN HELP ME, MY DEAR! ONLY A NEW MOLECULAR SYSTEM CAN PREVENT MY DEATH NOW, AND THAT SYSTEM'S ON FILE ON MERCURY -- IN THE DEPARTMENT OF ETERNAL EXISTENCE!


WHA--WHAT D'YOU MEAN?
YOU SEE, THERE IS NO DEATH ON MERCURY. WHEN A CITIZEN REACHES THE END OF HIS LIFE-SPAN, THE DEPARTMENT SUPPLIES HIM WITH A NEW SYSTEM FROM THE FILES! OUR BODIES ARE MADE UP OF QUADRILLIONS OF MOLECULES WHICH DISINTEGRATE AS WE AGE. OUR SCIENTISTS CREATED A NEW TYPE OF MOLECULAR SYSTEM WHICH COULD BE EXCHANGED FOR THE OLD.

"NOW, ALL MERCURIANS HAVE THEIR SYSTEMS REGISTERED AT BIRTH BY GIANT MACHINES. A RAY-FILM RECORDS EVERY ONE OF THE QUADRILLIONS OF MOLECULES WHICH MAKE UP THE NERVES, GLANDS AND TISSUE OF OUR SYSTEMS ---



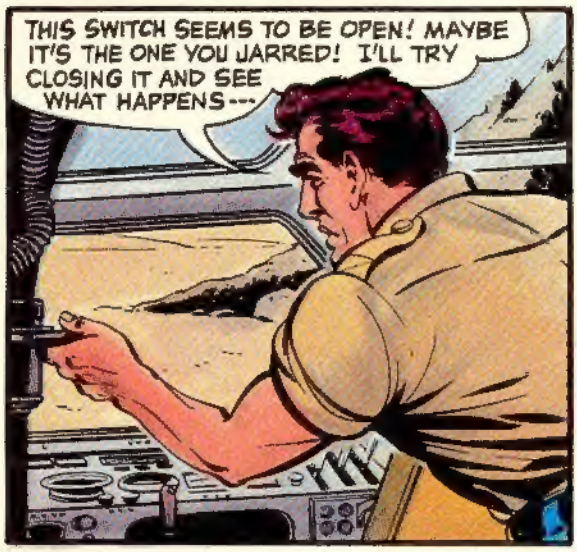
Even as Laura's horrified scream rings out, the Mercurian vanishes, leaving only a handful of dust motes dancing in the air to mark his passage!

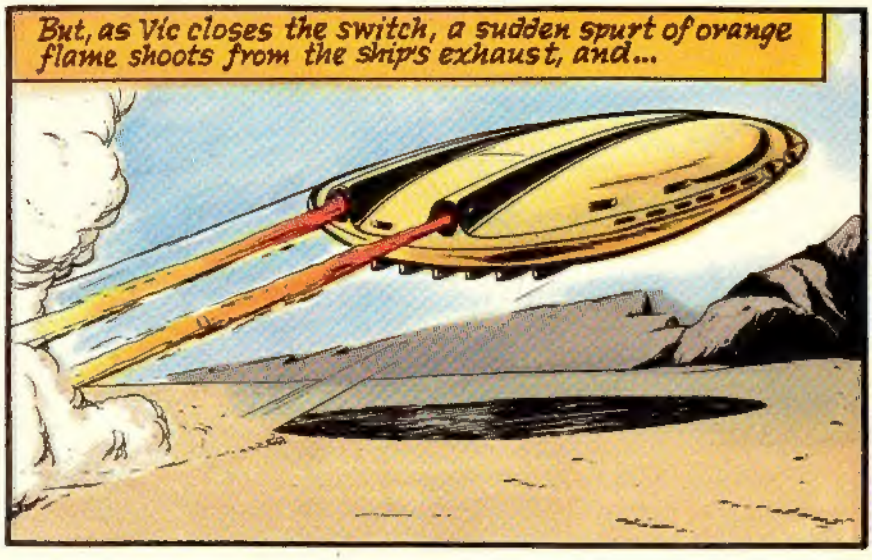


Stunned by the sudden disappearance of the Mercurian, Laura sinks weakly into a seat by the ship's control board.
IT'S HARD TO BELIEVE THIS HAPPENED! IF IT WASN'T FOR THE SPACE SHIP, I'D SWEAR THE WHOLE THING WAS JUST A DREAM!
I FEEL BADLY, VIC! I-I LIKED THAT POOR LITTLE MAN! I---? OH!
SNAP

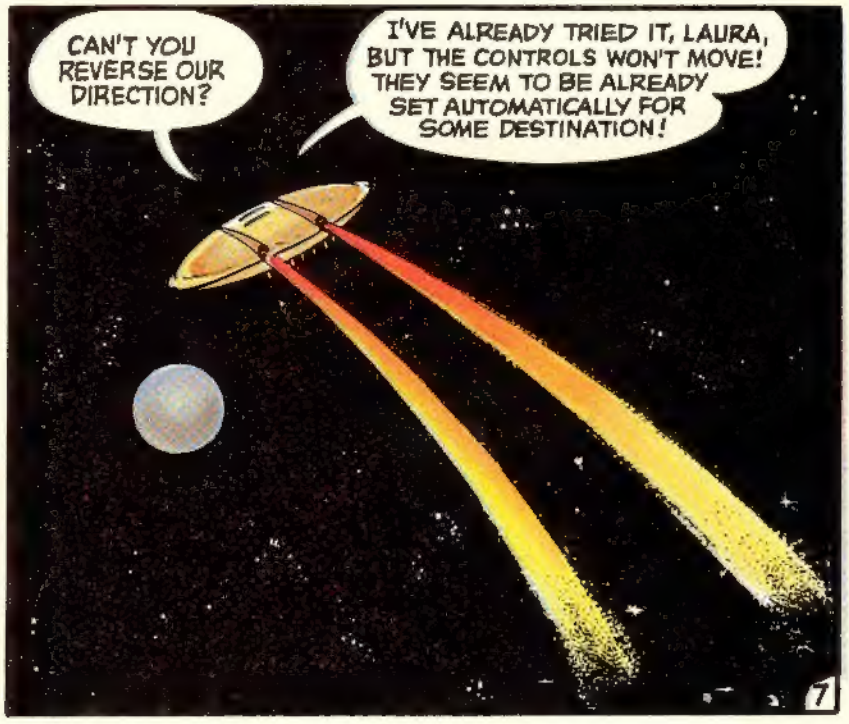
YOU SWITCHED ON A LIGHTED MAP OF SOME SORT WITH YOUR ELBOW. SEE, UP THERE IS MERCURY AND DOWN HERE IS EARTH.
I'D BETTER GET OUT OF THIS SEAT!

But, as Laura scrambles from the seat in alarm, her foot depresses a floor lever, and a tremor runs through the space craft!
OH, VIC -- I DID SOMETHING AGAIN!
YOU STARTED A MOTOR OR SOMETHING! HEAR IT HUM! LET ME IN THERE! MAYBE I CAN FIND THE GADGET THAT SHUTS IT OFF!

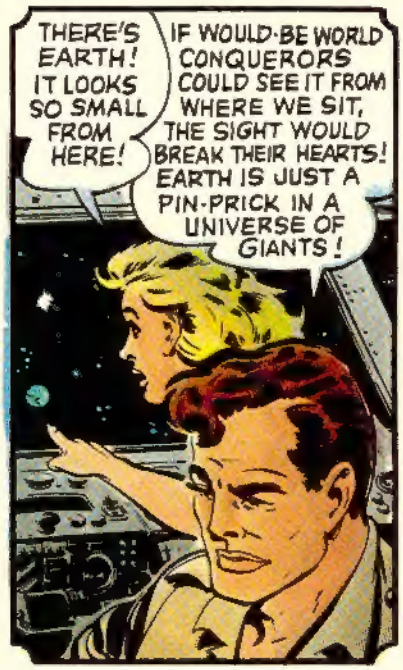

THIS SWITCH SEEMS TO BE OPEN! MAYBE IT'S THE ONE YOU JARRED! I'LL TRY CLOSING IT AND SEE WHAT HAPPENS---


But, as Vic closes the switch, a sudden spurt of orange flame shoots from the ship's exhaust, and...

OH, VIC, WE'RE LEAVING EARTH!
AND THE LIGHTED SYMBOL MARKING EARTH ON THE SOLAR MAP'S GONE OUT! WE MUST ALREADY BE BEYOND ITS GRAVITATIONAL PULL!

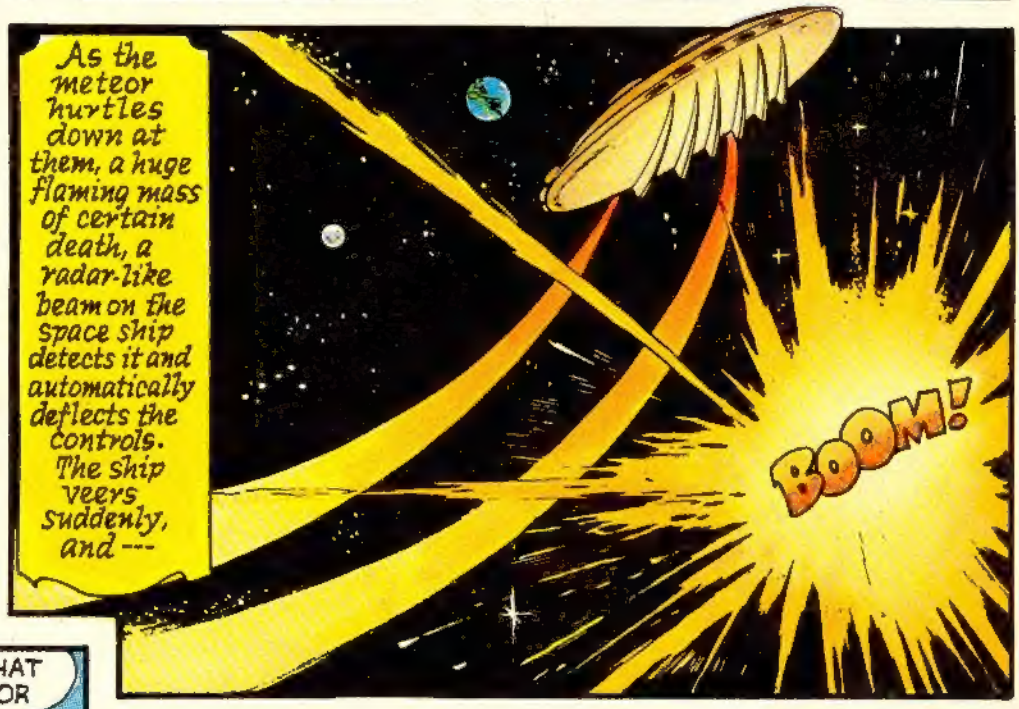

CAN'T YOU REVERSE OUR DIRECTION?
I'VE ALREADY TRIED IT, LAURA, BUT THE CONTROLS WON'T MOVE! THEY SEEM TO BE ALREADY SET AUTOMATICALLY FOR SOME DESTINATION!

The saucer-like craft carries Vic and Laura through space almost as fast as the speed of light, the universe unfolding majestically before them!
OH, LOOK AT THE MOON, VIC! DID YOU EVER SEE ANYTHING SO... SO OVER-WHELMING!
IT'S AN AWESOME SPECTACLE, ALL RIGHT! IT MAKES ME FEEL TINY AND INSIGNIFI-CANT!

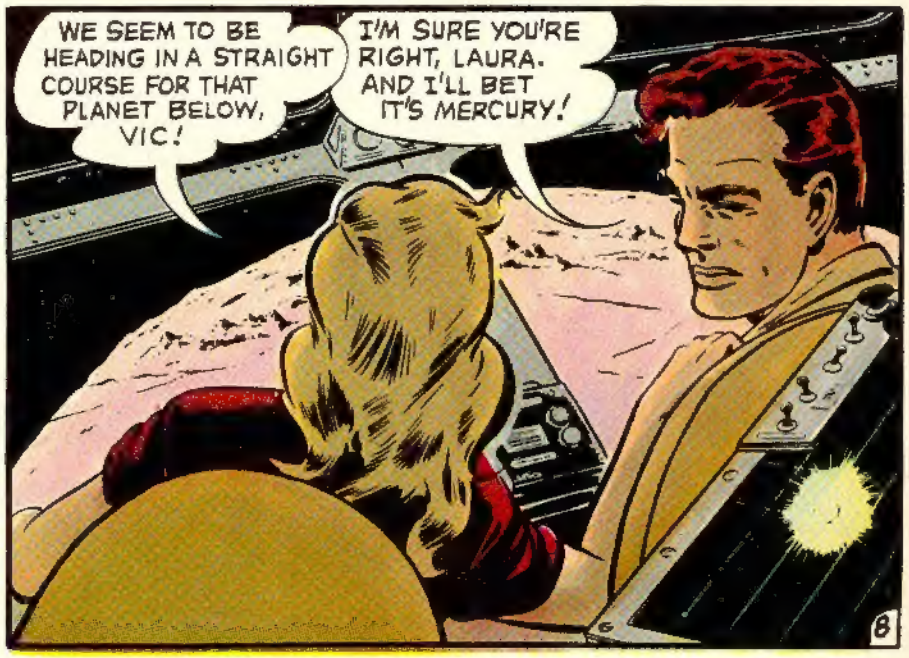

THERE'S EARTH! IT LOOKS SO SMALL FROM HERE!
IF WOULD-BE WORLD CONQUERORS COULD SEE IT FROM WHERE WE SIT, THE SIGHT WOULD BREAK THEIR HEARTS! EARTH IS JUST A PIN-PRICK IN A UNIVERSE OF GIANTS!

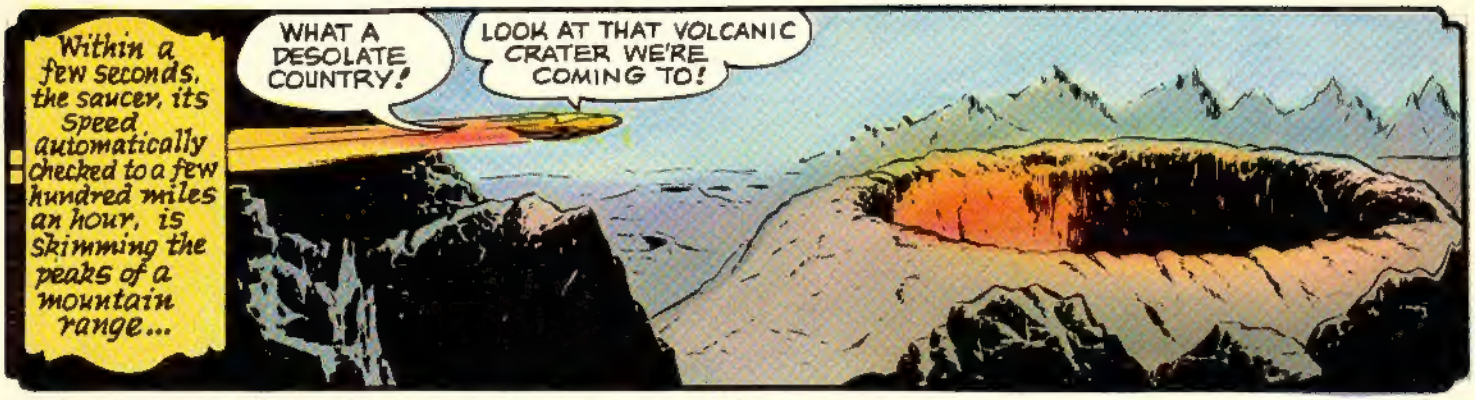
Time stands still as the ship penetrates the innermost secrets of space... Suddenly...
VIC, WE'RE RUNNING INTO SOMETHING!
IT'S A RAIN OF METEORS AND WE'RE RIGHT IN THE MIDDLE! GIVE ME THOSE CONTROLS!

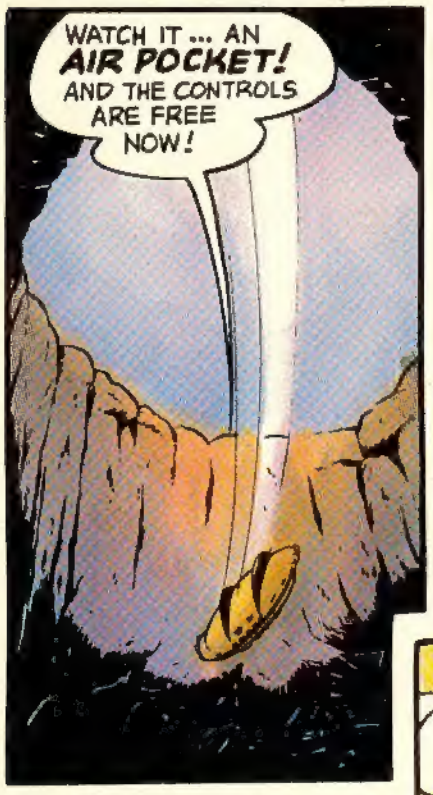
THERE'S ANOTHER ONE COMING IN TO OUR LEFT! VIC, CAN YOU DO ANYTHING?
I CAN'T DO ANYTHING! I FORGOT THAT THE CONTROLS ARE LOCKED!


As the meteor hurtles down at them, a huge flaming mass of certain death, a radar-like beam on the space ship detects it and automatically deflects the controls. The ship veers suddenly, and ---
BOOM!

OH, VIC... THAT WAS SO -- SO CLOSE!
WE CAN THANK THAT RADAR DEVICE FOR SAVING US!


WE SEEM TO BE HEADING IN A STRAIGHT COURSE FOR THAT PLANET BELOW, VIC!
I'M SURE YOU'RE RIGHT, LAURA. AND I'LL BET IT'S MERCURY!

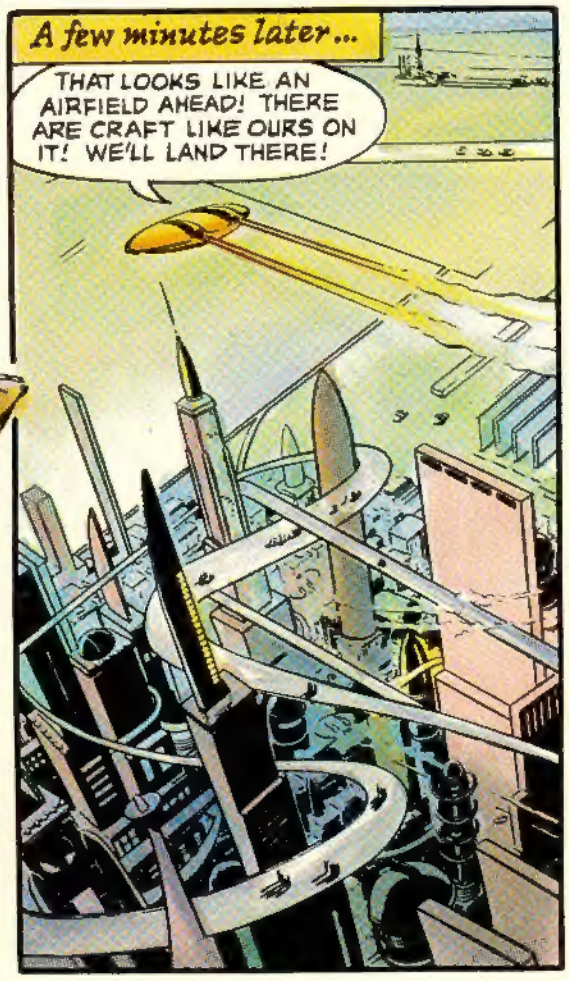

Within a few seconds, the saucer, its speed automatically checked to a few hundred miles an hour, is skimming the peaks of a mountain range...
WHAT A DESOLATE COUNTRY!
LOOK AT THAT VOLCANIC CRATER WE'RE COMING TO!


WATCH IT ... AN AIR POCKET! AND THE CONTROLS ARE FREE NOW!

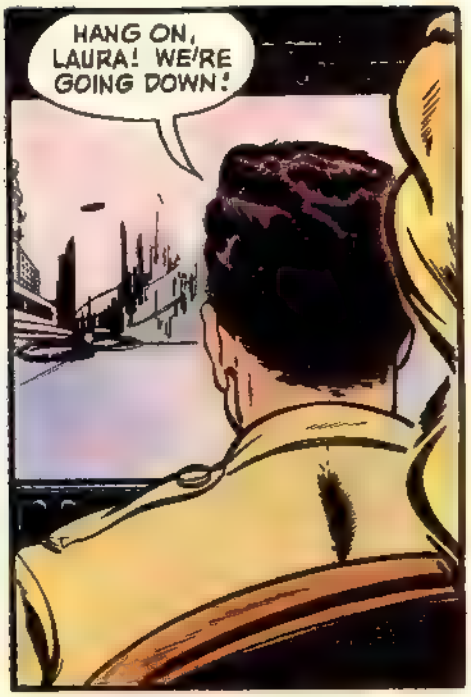
I WISH WE'D SET DOWN ON SOLID GROUND! I CAN'T TAKE MUCH MORE OF THIS!

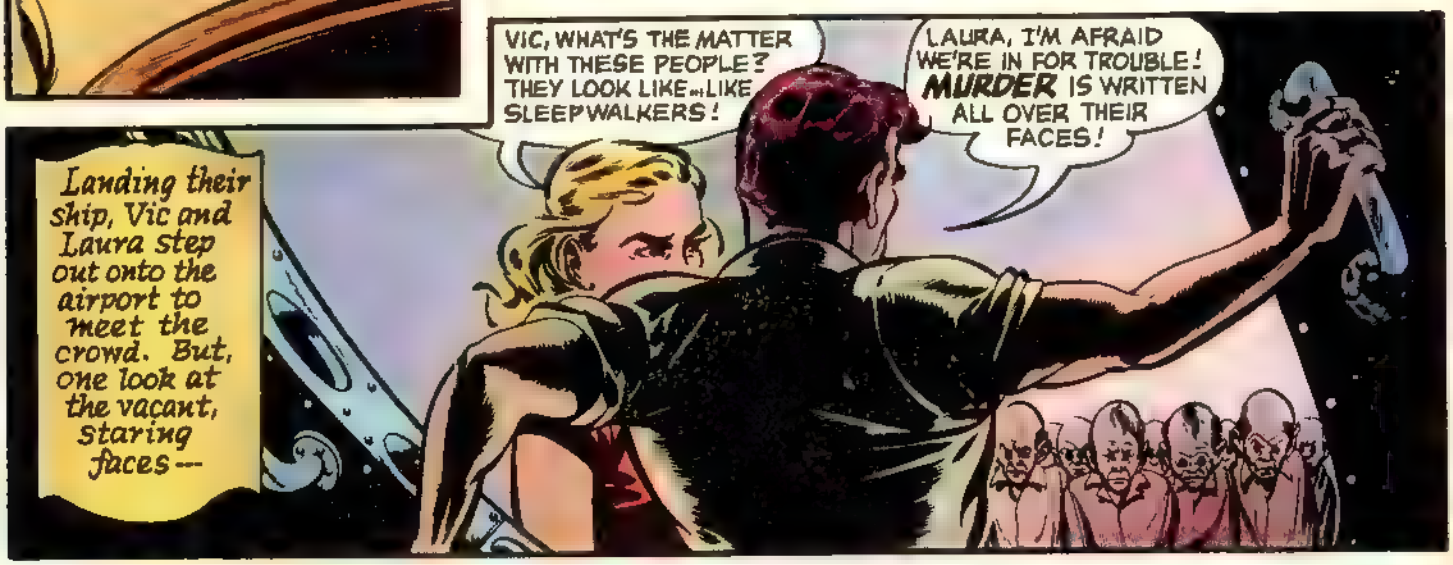
TAKE A LOOK AHEAD OF US! IT'LL TAKE YOUR MIND OFF THE DANGER WE'VE FACED!
GREEN FIELDS AND SUN SPARKLING OFF CLEAR WATER! GOSH, IT MAKES ME HOMESICK FOR EARTH!

WE'RE COMING TO A CITY! WE'LL BE LANDING SOON --THE FIRST EARTHMEN EVER TO VISIT ANOTHER PLANET! HOW DOES IT MAKE YOU FEEL?
HUMBLE, VIC... LIKE COLUMBUS MUST HAVE FELT WHEN HE DISCOVERED A NEW CONTINENT!

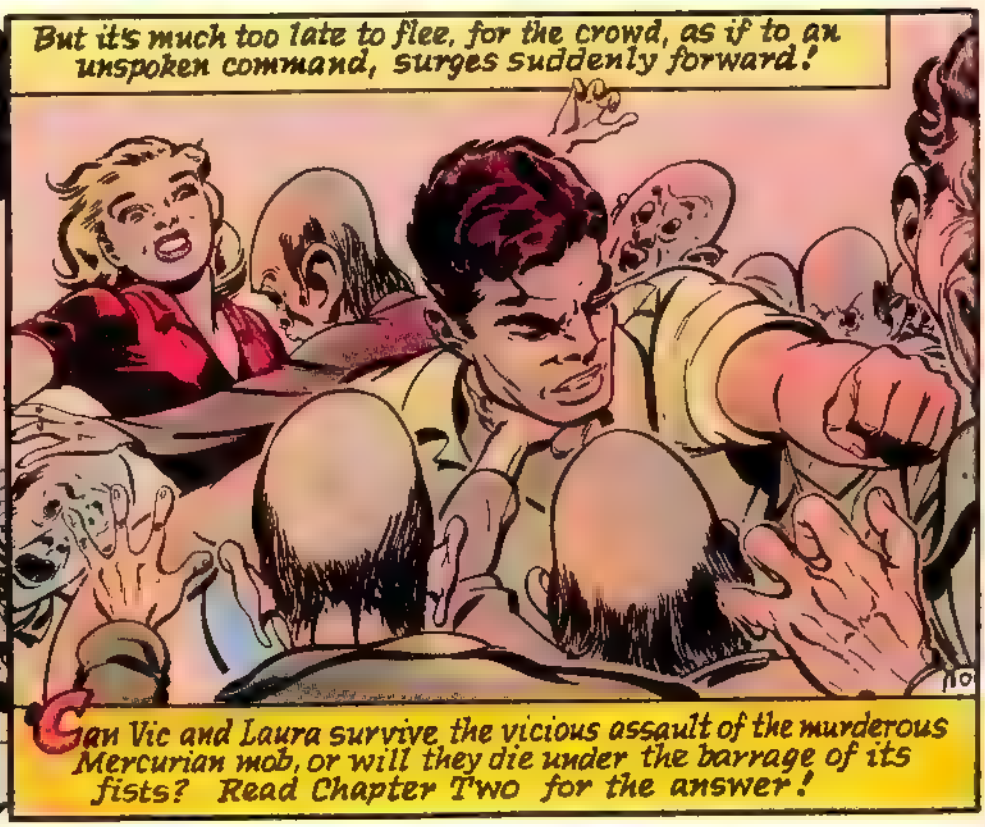

A few minutes later...
THAT LOOKS LIKE AN AIRFIELD AHEAD! THERE ARE CRAFT LIKE OURS ON IT! WE'LL LAND THERE!

WE'RE GOING TO HAVE SOME RECEPTION COMMITTEE! LOOK AT THE PEOPLE POURING INTO THE STREETS!

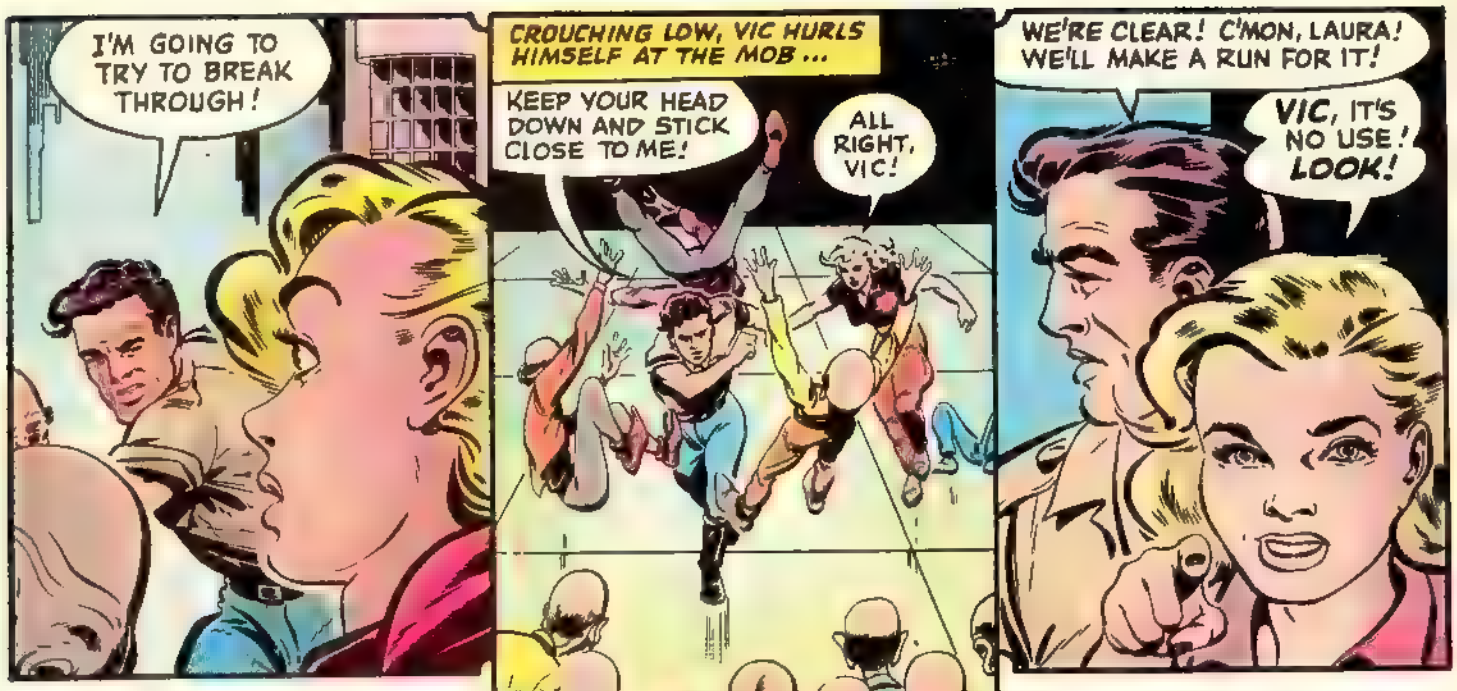

HANG ON, LAURA! WE'RE GOING DOWN!

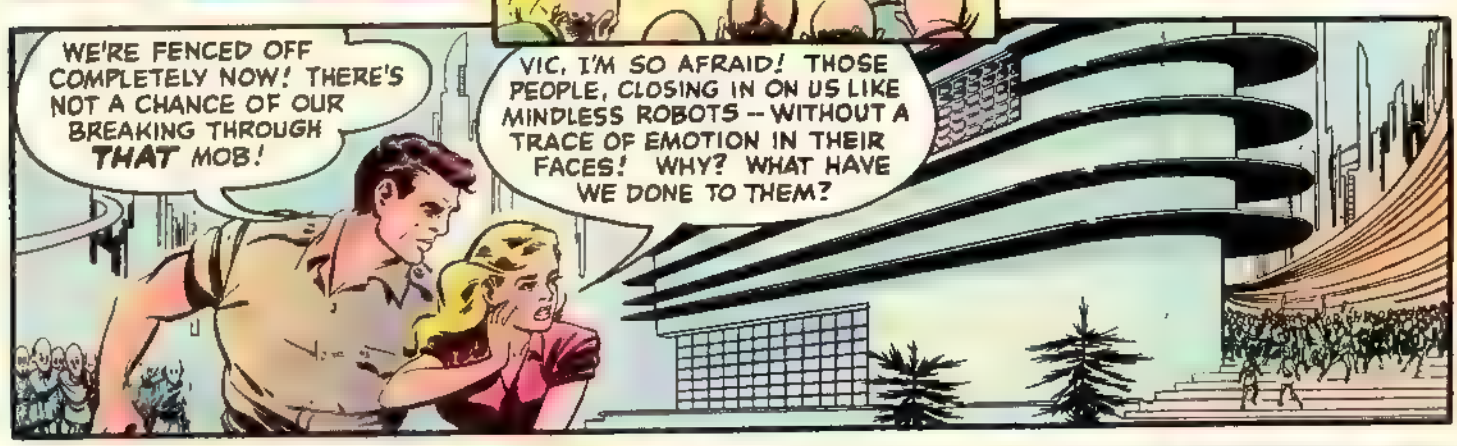

Landing their ship, Vic and Laura step out onto the airport to meet the crowd. But, one look at the vacant, staring faces---
VIC, WHAT'S THE MATTER WITH THESE PEOPLE? THEY LOOK LIKE--LIKE SLEEPWALKERS!
LAURA, I'M AFRAID WE'RE IN FOR TROUBLE! MURDER IS WRITTEN ALL OVER THEIR FACES!

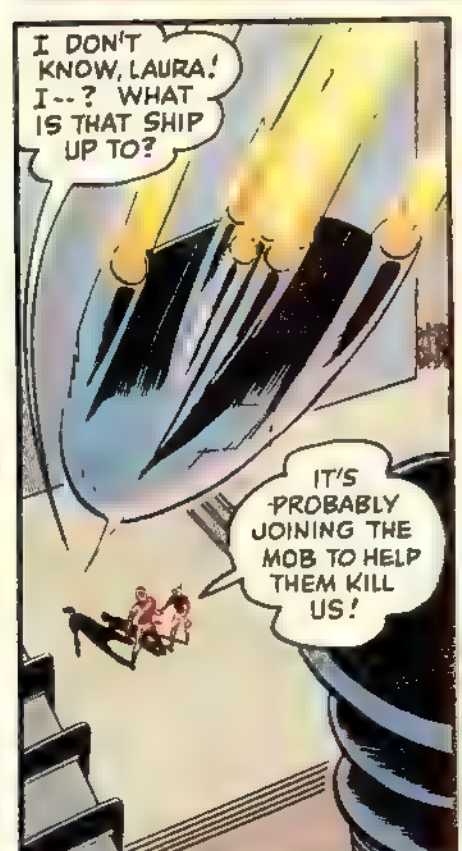
VIC, I'M AFRAID!
BACK IN THE PLANE, LAURA... QUICK! MAYBE WE CAN TAKE OFF BEFORE ---

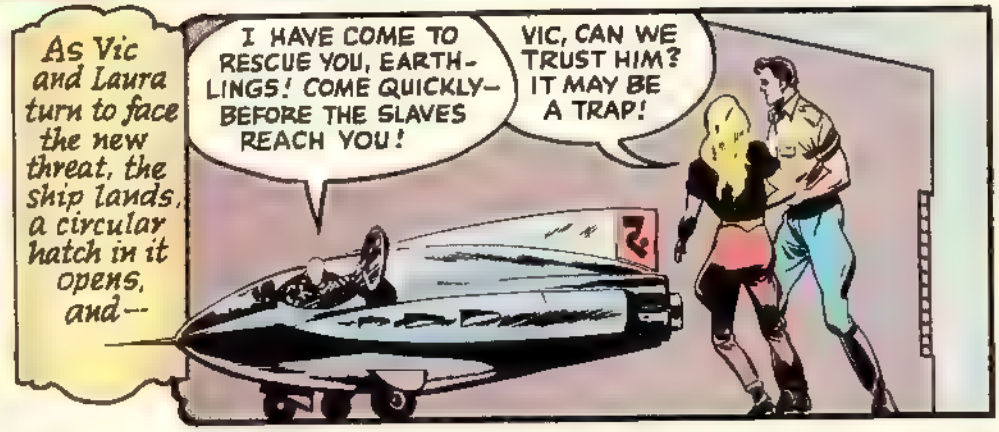

But it's much too late to flee, for the crowd, as if to an unspoken command, surges suddenly forward!
Can Vic and Laura survive the vicious assault of the murderous Mercurian mob, or will they die under the barrage of its fists? Read Chapter Two for the answer!

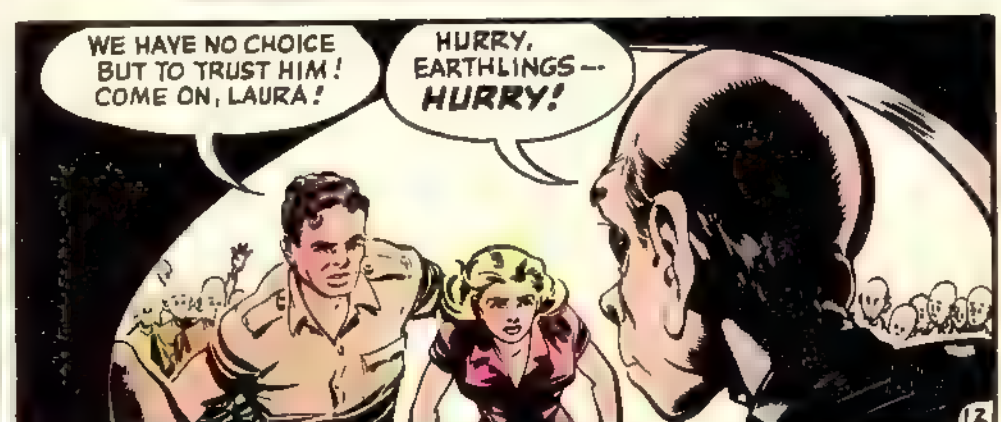
Chapter Two
The EVIL of SZZZ!
VIC TORRY and Laura Brooks face miraculous release from the crazed Mercurian mob, only to face a far more perilous danger!
OH, VIC -- HELP ME!
LAURA! WE'VE GOT A CHANCE! THE MURCURIANS ARE WEAKER THAN I THOUGHT!
Laura's scream for help pours new strength into Vic's battered body, and---

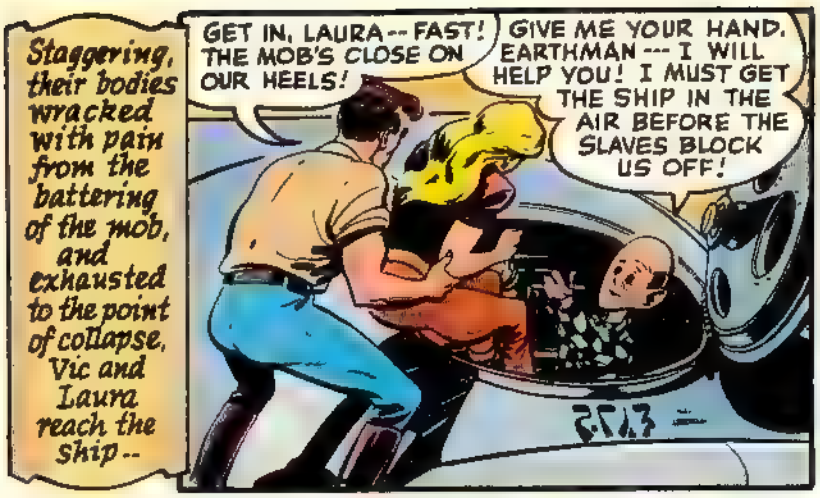

I'M GOING TO TRY TO BREAK THROUGH!
CROUCHING LOW, VIC HURLS HIMSELF AT THE MOB ...
KEEP YOUR HEAD DOWN AND STICK CLOSE TO ME!
ALL RIGHT, VIC!
WE'RE CLEAR! C'MON, LAURA! WE'LL MAKE A RUN FOR IT!
VIC, IT'S NO USE! LOOK!

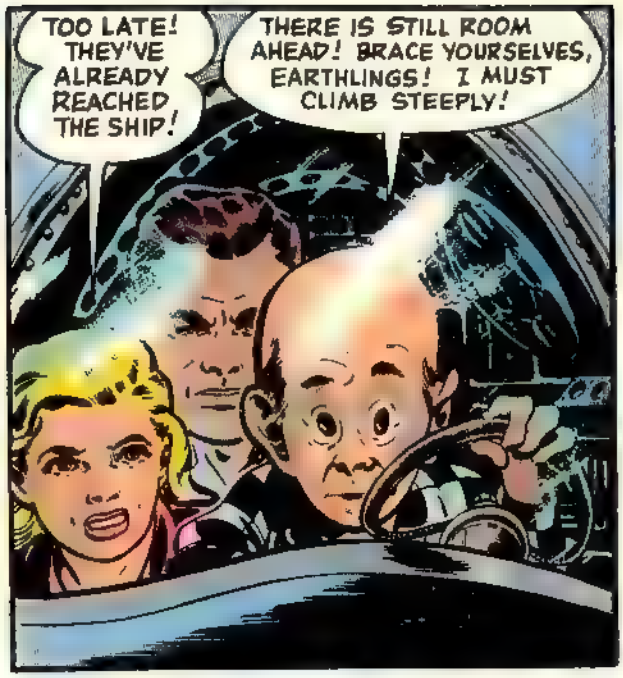

WE'RE FENCED OFF COMPLETELY NOW! THERE'S NOT A CHANCE OF OUR BREAKING THROUGH THAT MOB!
VIC, I'M SO AFRAID! THOSE PEOPLE, CLOSING IN ON US LIKE MINDLESS ROBOTS -- WITHOUT A TRACE OF EMOTION IN THEIR FACES! WHY? WHAT HAVE WE DONE TO THEM?

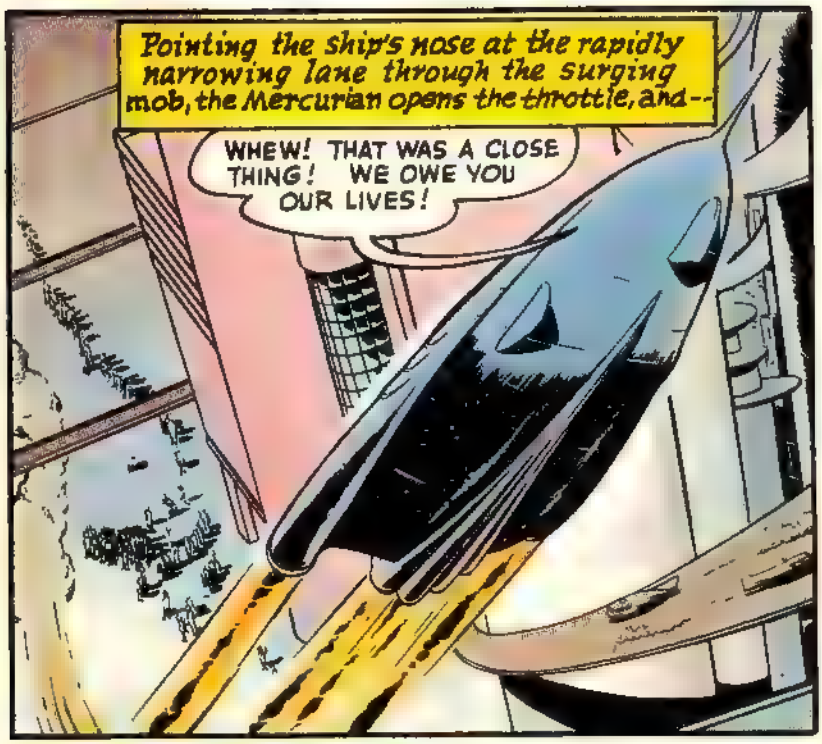

I DON'T KNOW, LAURA! I--? WHAT IS THAT SHIP UP TO?
IT'S PROBABLY JOINING THE MOB TO HELP THEM KILL US!

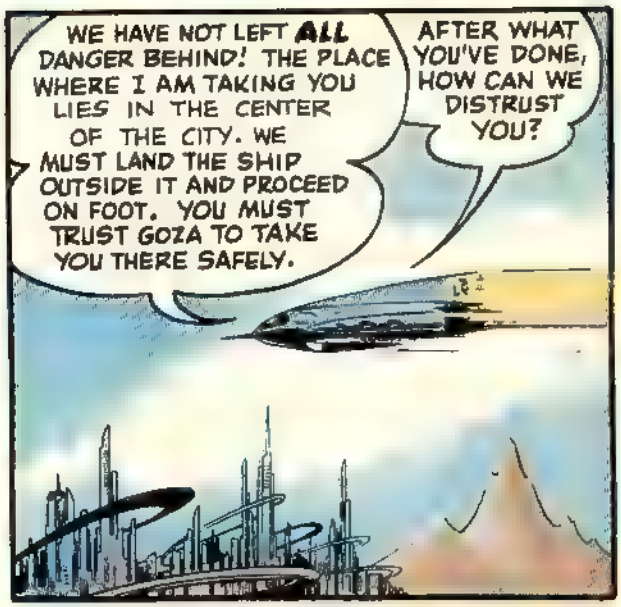

As Vic and Laura turn to face the new threat, the ship lands, a circular hatch in it opens, and--
I HAVE COME TO RESCUE YOU, EARTHLINGS! COME QUICKLY-- BEFORE THE SLAVES REACH YOU!
VIC, CAN WE TRUST HIM? IT MAY BE A TRAP!

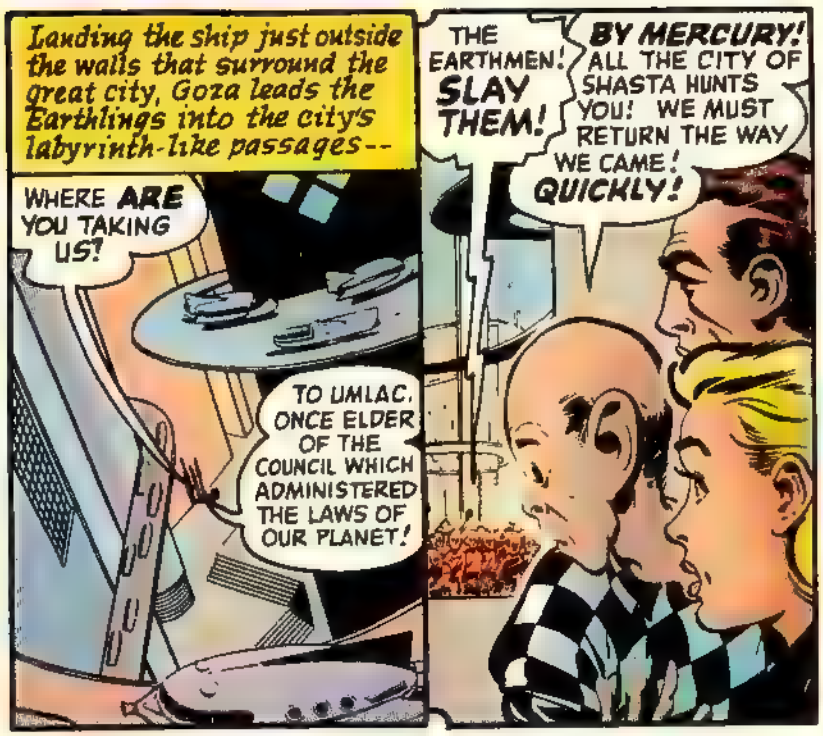

WE HAVE NO CHOICE BUT TO TRUST HIM! COME ON, LAURA!
HURRY, EARTHLINGS -- HURRY!


Staggering, their bodies wracked with pain from the battering of the mob, and exhausted to the point of collapse, Vic and Laura reach the ship--
GET IN, LAURA -- FAST! THE MOB'S CLOSE ON OUR HEELS!
GIVE ME YOUR HAND, EARTHMAN --- I WILL HELP YOU! I MUST GET THE SHIP IN THE AIR BEFORE THE SLAVES BLOCK US OFF!


TOO LATE! THEY'VE ALREADY REACHED THE SHIP!
THERE IS STILL ROOM AHEAD! BRACE YOURSELVES, EARTHLINGS! I MUST CLIMB STEEPLY!


Pointing the ship's nose at the rapidly narrowing lane through the surging mob, the Mercurian opens the throttle, and--
WHEW! THAT WAS A CLOSE THING! WE OWE YOU OUR LIVES!


WE HAVE NOT LEFT ALL DANGER BEHIND! THE PLACE WHERE I AM TAKING YOU LIES IN THE CENTER OF THE CITY. WE MUST LAND THE SHIP OUTSIDE IT AND PROCEED ON FOOT. YOU MUST TRUST GOZA TO TAKE YOU THERE SAFELY.
AFTER WHAT YOU'VE DONE, HOW CAN WE DISTRUST YOU?

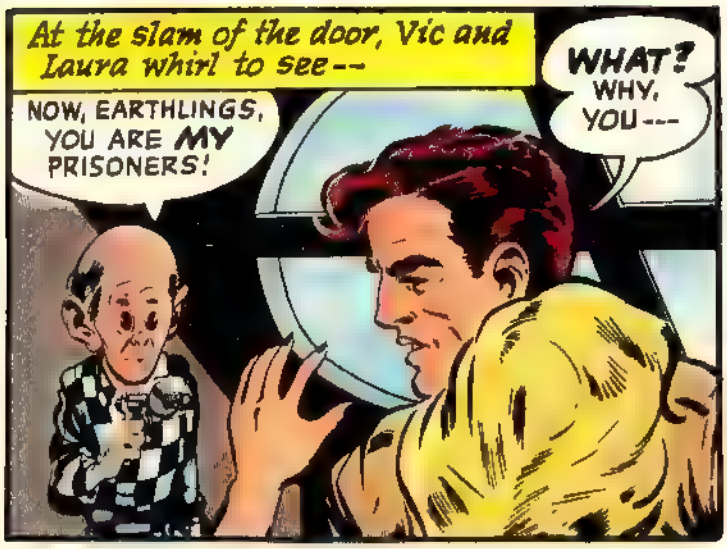

Landing the ship just outside the walls that surround the great city, Goza leads the Earthlings into the city's labyrinth-like passages--
WHERE ARE YOU TAKING US?
TO UMLAC, ONCE ELDER OF THE COUNCIL WHICH ADMINISTERED THE LAWS OF OUR PLANET!
THE EARTHMEN! SLAY THEM!
BY MERCURY! ALL THE CITY OF SHASTA HUNTS YOU! WE MUST RETURN THE WAY WE CAME! QUICKLY!

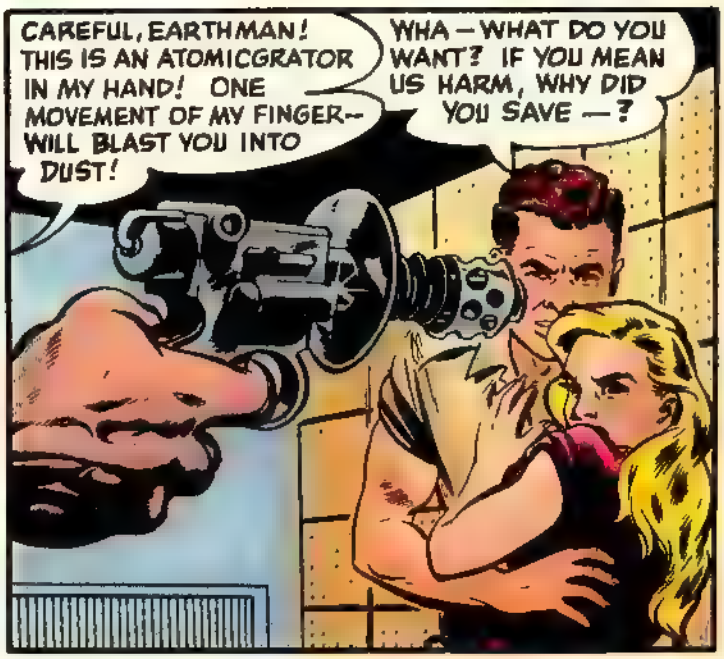
THIS WAY! I CAN'T LET YOU FALL INTO THE HANDS OF THAT MOB NOW!
WE'RE GRATEFUL TO YOU, GOZA. WE OWE YOU OUR LIVES!

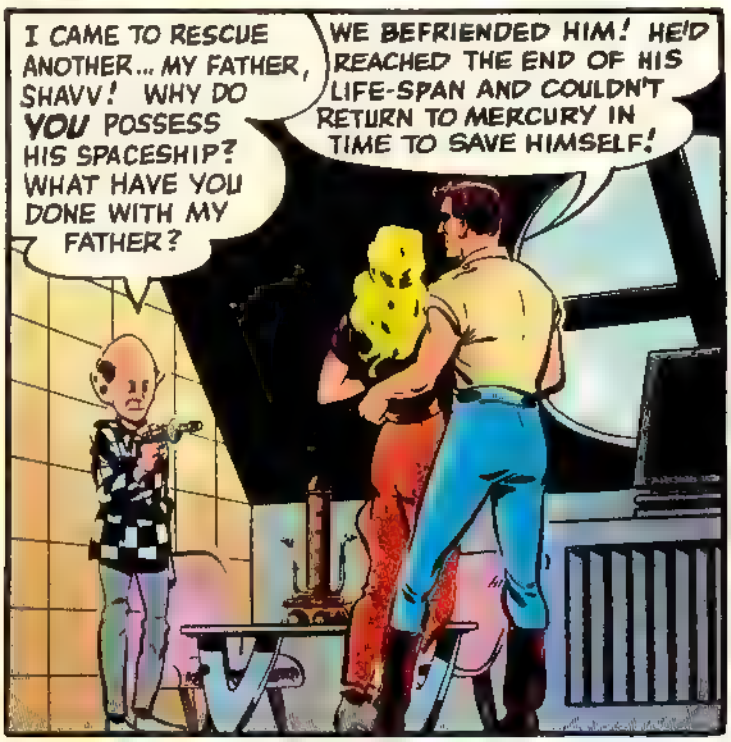
I HAVE MY OWN REASONS FOR SAVING YOU. COME! WE'LL SOON BE THERE AND SAFE -- FOR AWHILE.

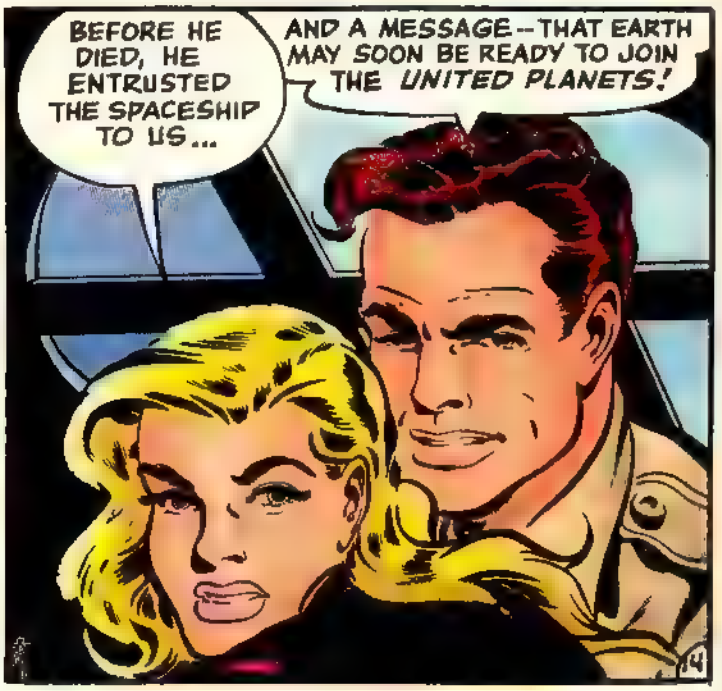
Soon...
HERE WE ARE. UMLAC AWAITS YOU INSIDE. ENTER, PLEASE!

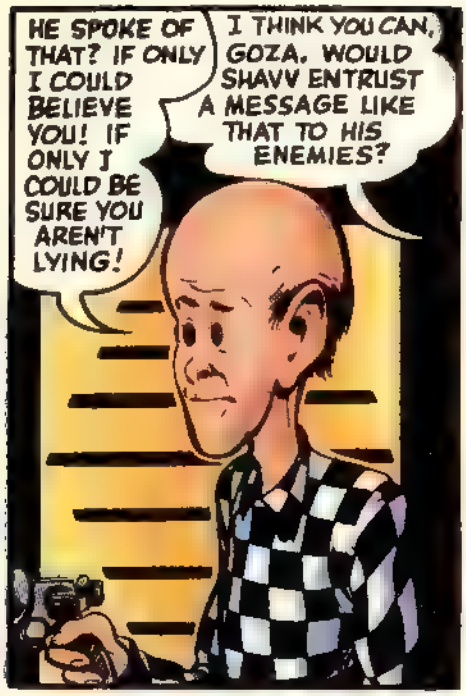
VIC, THE ROOM'S EMPTY! THERE'S NO ONE HERE! I --?
SLAM!


At the slam of the door, Vic and Laura whirl to see--
NOW, EARTHLINGS, YOU ARE MY PRISONERS!
WHAT? WHY, YOU---

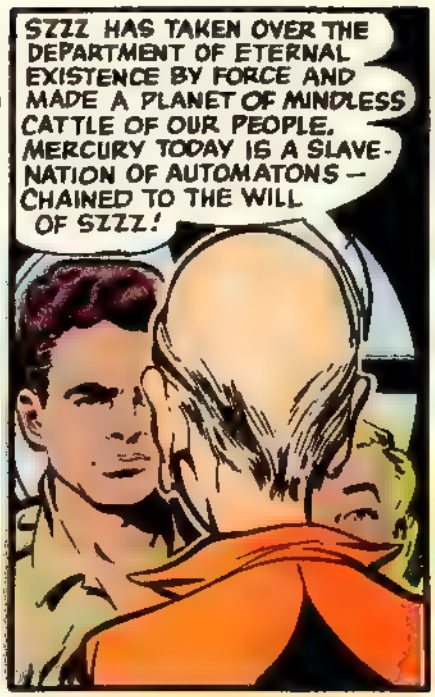

CAREFUL, EARTHMAN! THIS IS AN ATOMICGRATOR IN MY HAND! ONE MOVEMENT OF MY FINGER-- WILL BLAST YOU INTO DUST!
WHA -- WHAT DO YOU WANT? IF YOU MEAN US HARM, WHY DID YOU SAVE --?

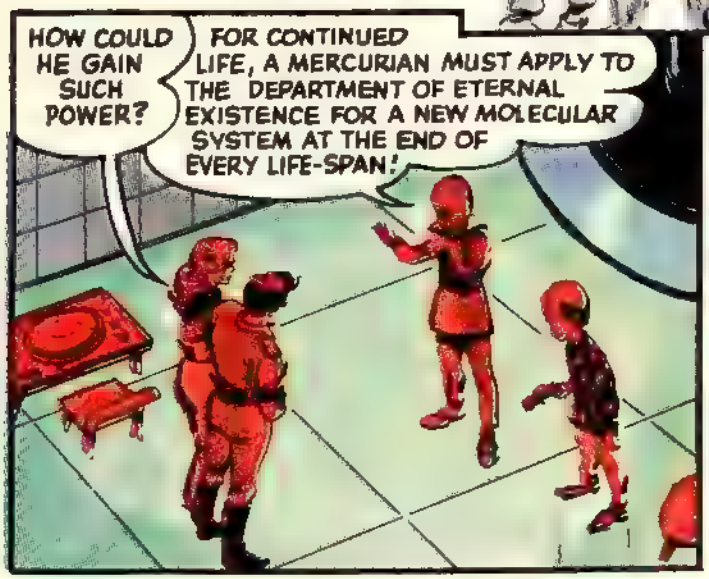

I CAME TO RESCUE ANOTHER... MY FATHER, SHAVV! WHY DO YOU POSSESS HIS SPACESHIP? WHAT HAVE YOU DONE WITH MY FATHER?
WE BEFRIENDED HIM! HE'D REACHED THE END OF HIS LIFE-SPAN AND COULDN'T RETURN TO MERCURY IN TIME TO SAVE HIMSELF!


BEFORE HE DIED, HE ENTRUSTED THE SPACESHIP TO US...
AND A MESSAGE -- THAT EARTH MAY SOON BE READY TO JOIN THE UNITED PLANETS!

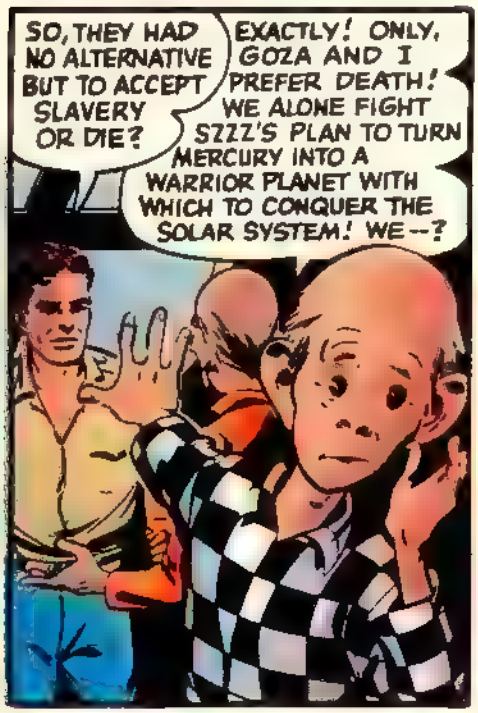

HE SPOKE OF THAT? IF ONLY I COULD BELIEVE YOU! IF ONLY I COULD BE SURE YOU AREN'T LYING!
I THINK YOU CAN, GOZA. WOULD SHAVV ENTRUST A MESSAGE LIKE THAT TO HIS ENEMIES?

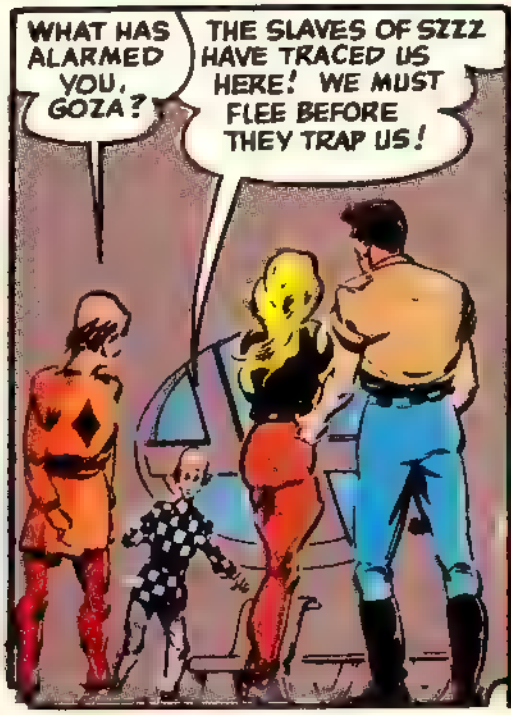
UMLAC!
THESE TWO SPEAK THE TRUTH! WELCOME TO MERCURY, EARTHMEN— THOUGH YOUR MESSAGE COMES TOO LATE!


SZZZ HAS TAKEN OVER THE DEPARTMENT OF ETERNAL EXISTENCE BY FORCE AND MADE A PLANET OF MINDLESS CATTLE OF OUR PEOPLE. MERCURY TODAY IS A SLAVE-NATION OF AUTOMATONS — CHAINED TO THE WILL OF SZZZ!


HOW COULD HE GAIN SUCH POWER?
FOR CONTINUED LIFE, A MERCURIAN MUST APPLY TO THE DEPARTMENT OF ETERNAL EXISTENCE FOR A NEW MOLECULAR SYSTEM AT THE END OF EVERY LIFE-SPAN!

YES, SHAVV TOLD US THIS.
SZZZ HAS REASSEMBLED EACH SYSTEM, REMOVING THE POWER FOR *INDEPENDENT* THOUGHT AND REASONING, BUT LEAVING THE BRAIN OPEN FOR *THOUGHT SUGGESTION* BY HIMSELF! HE GIVES HIS ORDERS BY ***THOUGHT PROPULSION!***


SO, THEY HAD NO ALTERNATIVE BUT TO ACCEPT SLAVERY OR DIE?
EXACTLY! ONLY, GOZA AND I PREFER DEATH! WE ALONE FIGHT SZZZ'S PLAN TO TURN MERCURY INTO A WARRIOR PLANET WITH WHICH TO CONQUER THE SOLAR SYSTEM! WE --?


WHAT HAS ALARMED YOU, GOZA?
THE SLAVES OF SZZZ HAVE TRACED US HERE! WE MUST FLEE BEFORE THEY TRAP US!

IT IS ALREADY TOO LATE TO FLEE! THEY HAVE BLOCKED US OFF!
SLAY! SLAY! SLAY!

As the mob surges into the room, the Earthlings and their Mercurian friends retreat behind a huge transparent door in the rear of the building!

THIS WILL HOLD THEM FOR AWHILE – AND IF THEY DO BREAK THROUGH IT, YOU CAN USE YOUR ATOMICGRATOR!

NO! MY POOR PEOPLE ARE NOT RESPONSIBLE! IT IS SZZI'S WILL THAT TELLS THEM TO SLAY! NOR WILL THE DOOR HOLD THEM FOR EVEN A LITTLE WHILE!

WHAT DO YOU MEAN?

SZZ'S WILL IS PRECEEDING THEM, HIS THOUGHTS, PROJECTED INTO THIS ROOM -- ARE LEADING THEM ON. THOUGHT IS POWER, ENERGY, AND NO DOOR OR WALL CAN WITHSTAND IT! WATCH!

Even at Goza's words, an awesome thing occurs! The huge door, untouched by human hand, bends inward like a bow, cracking weirdly under the strain of – THOUGHT!

VIC! IT'S BREAKING UP!

CRACK!

HOLY SMOKES!

CRASH!

WE'RE TRAPPED! THERE'S NO WAY OUT!

ONLY UP! TAKE OUR HANDS, EARTHLINGS! WE TOO HAVE THE POWER TO TRANSFORM OUR THOUGHTS TO ENERGY AND ACTION! IT WILL SAVE US!

All at once, Vic and Laura feel themselves rise from the floor, just as the mob closes in!

VIC, WE'RE FLOATING IN MID-AIR!

IT'S – IT'S INCREDIBLE! BUT CAN'T THE MOB DO THE SAME?

NO! ALL MERCURY HAD THE POWER BEFORE SZZZ ENSLAVED THEIR MINDS! NOW, ONLY GOZA AND I STILL RETAIN IT!

WATCH YOURSELVES, EARTHLINGS – WE ARE NEARING THE APERTURES THROUGH WHICH WE WILL LEAVE THIS BUILDING!

Climbing through the apertures, the party finds itself on the roof, and looking over the edge into the street below--

BY MERCURY! ALL THE CITY OF SHASTA SURROUNDS US!

WHAT DOES SZZZ HAVE AGAINST US? WHY MUST WE DIE?

SHOULD YOU RETURN TO EARTH WITH ONE OF THE FLYING SAUCERS, YOUR SCIENTISTS MIGHT SOON CONQUER SPACE AND DISCOVER SZZZ'S PLAN FOR SOLAR CONQUEST!

YES, AND THAT WOULD IMPERIL HIS PLAN! SO, YOU MUST DIE! WE ALSO ARE A PERIL! COME! WE CANNOT STAY HERE! WE MUST FLEE!

Leaving the city, the party passes one of the tyrant's giant war plants--

SPACESHIPS -- THOUSANDS OF THEM EQUIPPED WITH OUR DEADLIEST WEAPONS! THERE ARE NO PEACEFUL INDUSTRIES ON MERCURY NOW. SZZZ HAS CONVERTED EVERYTHING TO WAR!

IF ONLY WE COULD KILL OR CAPTURE SZZZ, AND FREE THE PEOPLE!..

WE'VE TRIED TO FIND HIM MANY TIMES, BUT HIS HEADQUARTERS ARE TOO WELL HIDDEN!

WE CAN'T STAY HERE ANY LONGER. ALREADY, SZZZ WILL HAVE BEEN INFORMED THAT HIS SLAVES HAVE ONCE AGAIN FAILED TO KILL US!

Then begins a period of nightmarish flight as Szzz seeks them out and attempts to destroy them--using every weapon at his command. At an abandoned hut where they finally find refuge---

YOU **WERE RIGHT**, GOZA! IT **IS** SZZZ'S ROBOT-CRAFT PATROL! YOU WARNED US JUST IN TIME!

RUN FOR THAT GROVE OF TREES! WE'LL BE HIDDEN BY THE SHADOWS!

WATCH, EARTHLINGS! THE ROBOT-SHIPS HAVE LOCATED THEIR TARGET!

BOOM!

COME! WE CAN'T STAY HERE!

But, no matter where they go, the search patrols of Szzz are close behind! At a mountain cave...

SOMEONE'S COMING UP THE TRAIL! VIC, LOOK! THEY HAVE SOME SORT OF HORRIBLE LOOKING BEASTS WITH THEM!

GINZAS! THEY HAVE BEEN TRAINED TO TRAIL MAN, AND TO KILL!

AT LEAST WE CAN FIGHT THEM! LISTEN! WHEN THEY COME CLOSER, LET THEM SEE YOU, THEN RUN! GIVE ME THE ATOMICGRATOR, GOZA!

HERE IT IS.

NOW--!

As their handlers unleash them, the vicious **GINZAS** *leap in pursuit of the fugitives, but---*

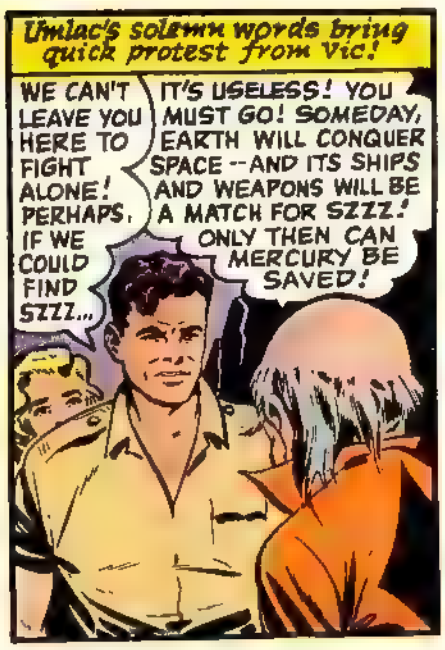
THERE'S TERRIBLE POWER IN THIS WEAPON! IF SZZZ SHOULD ATTACK EARTH NOW, WE'D BE HELPLESS!

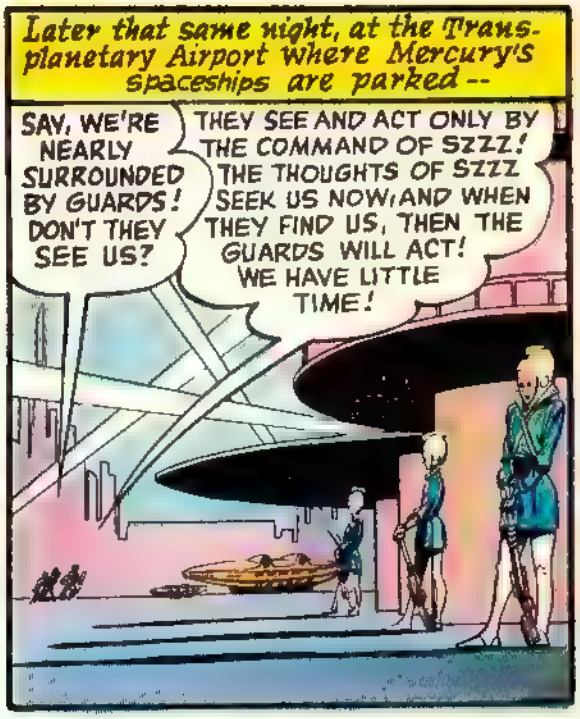
YOU HAVE STRUCK THE FIRST BLOW AT SZZZ, EARTHMAN, AND DELAYED HIS PLAN TO KILL US! WITH THE **GINZAS** DEAD, THE SLAVE-HANDLERS ARE HELPLESS!

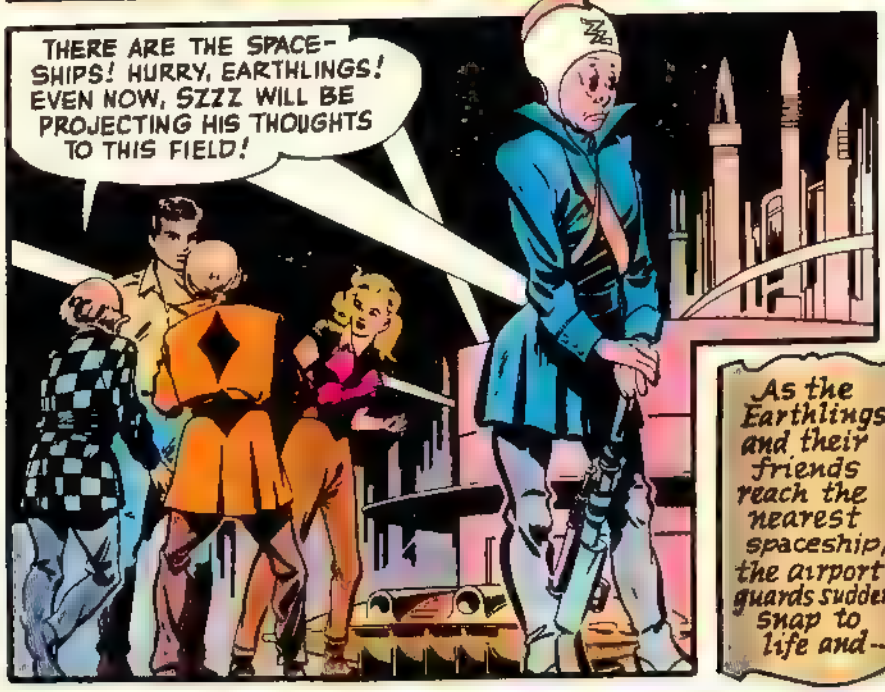
BUT FOR ONLY A LITTLE WHILE! WE MUST FACE REALITY! OUR DAYS ARE NUMBERED!

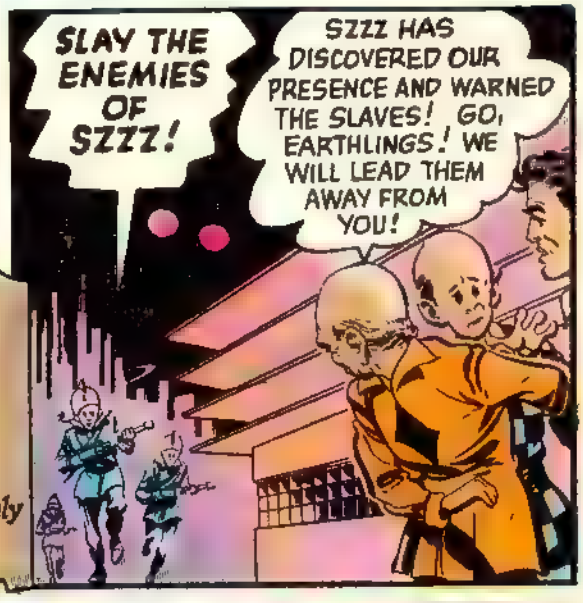
THAT IS TRUE. WE CANNOT **ALWAYS** ESCAPE!

THE EARTHLINGS MUST RETURN TO THEIR OWN PLANET! ALL MERCURY IS ENSLAVED BY SZZZ, AND ITS ONLY HOPE OF EVENTUAL FREEDOM LIES WITH EARTH! YOU MUST GO, EARTHLINGS!

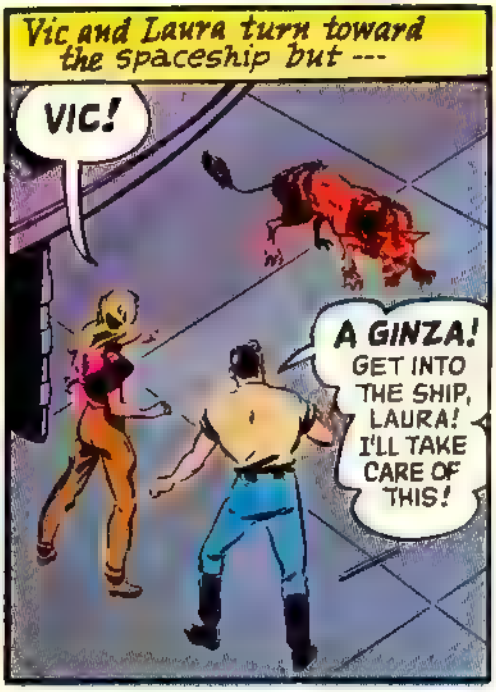


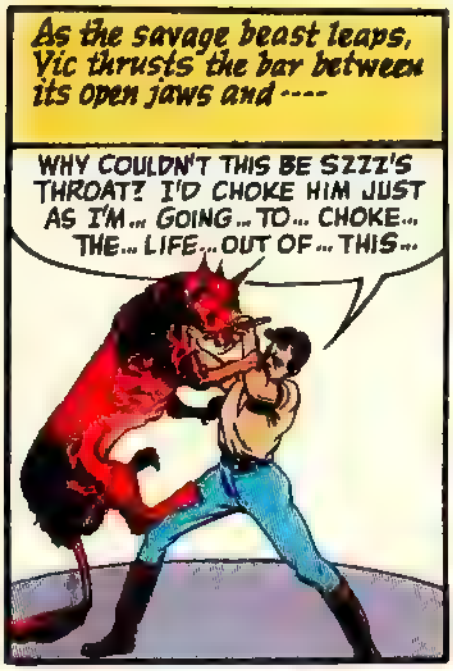




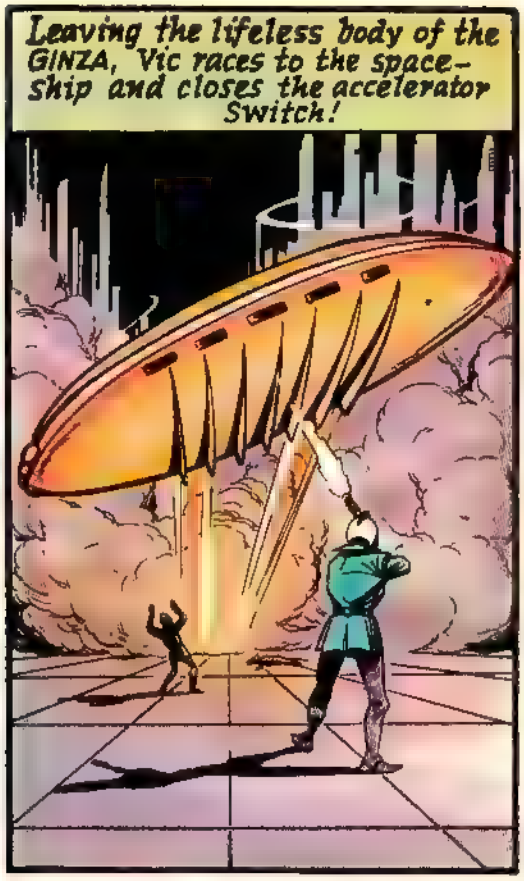


As the Earthlings and their friends reach the nearest spaceship, the airport guards suddenly snap to life and--

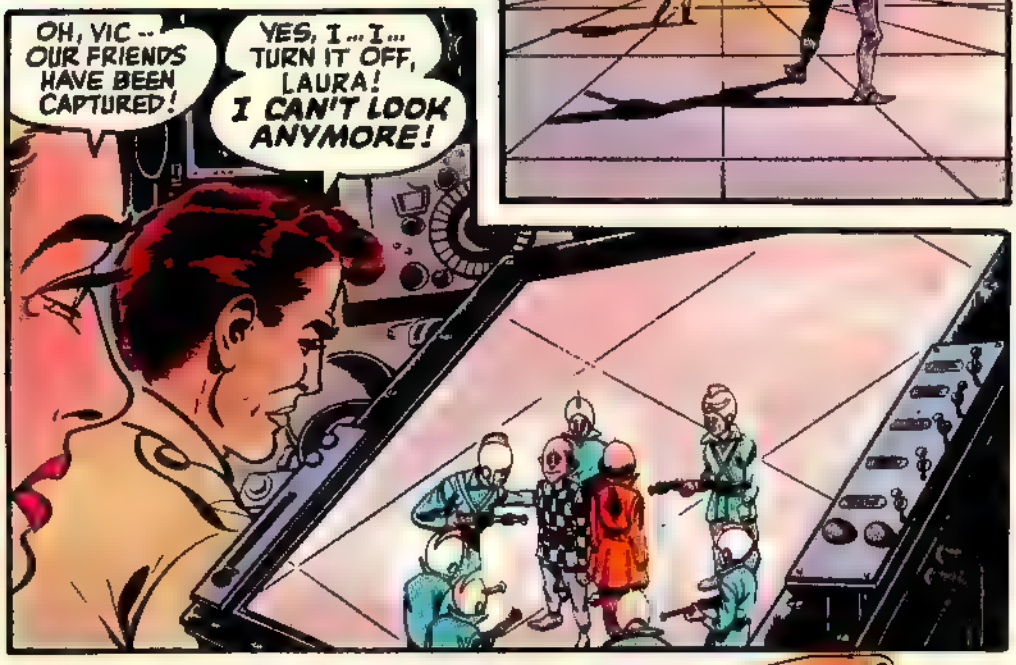



As the savage beast leaps, Vic thrusts the bar between its open jaws and ----
WHY COULDN'T THIS BE SZZZ'S THROAT? I'D CHOKE HIM JUST AS I'M... GOING... TO... CHOKE... THE... LIFE... OUT OF... THIS...

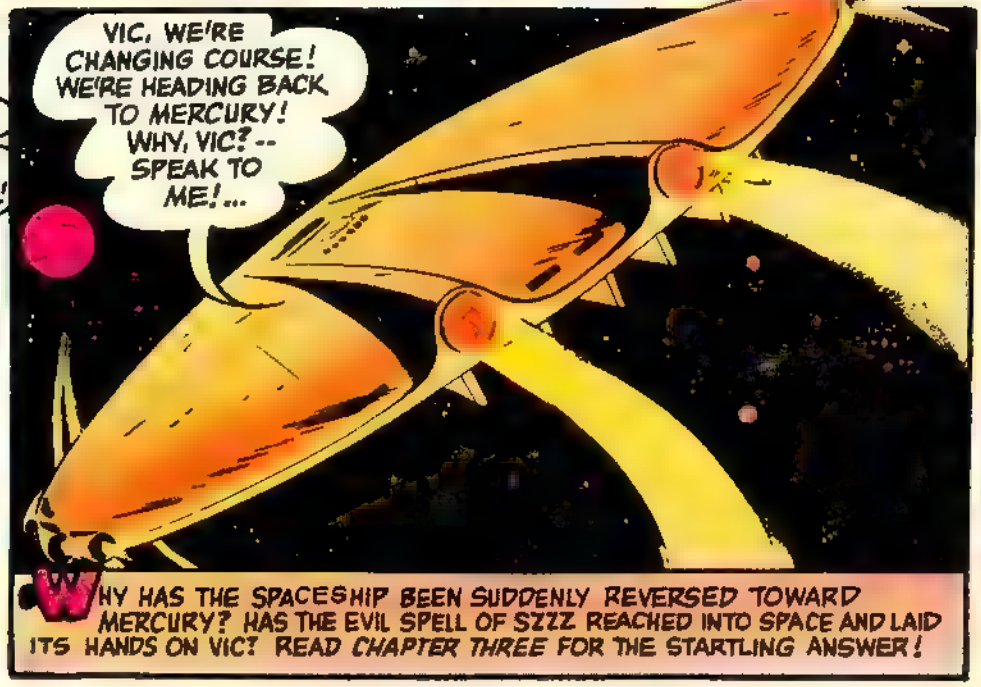
VIC! ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?
YES! PUSH THE STARTER BUTTON ON THE SPACE SHIP, LAURA! I'LL BE RIGHT WITH YOU!


Leaving the lifeless body of the GINZA, Vic races to the space-ship and closes the accelerator switch!

LAURA! THAT BUTTON BELOW THE SCREEN CONTROLS THE SHIP'S VIEWING DEVICE! IT'LL GIVE US A CLEAR VIEW OF THE WHOLE AIRPORT!
ALL RIGHT, VIC!


OH, VIC -- OUR FRIENDS HAVE BEEN CAPTURED!
YES, I... I... TURN IT OFF, LAURA! I CAN'T LOOK ANYMORE!

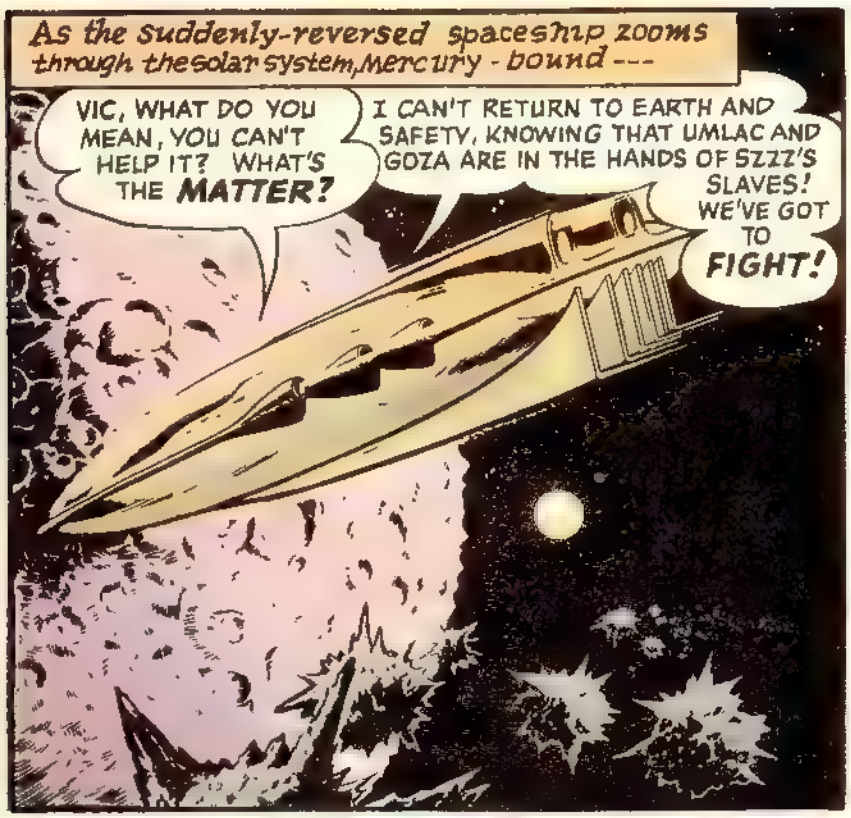
As the ship flashes along, a brooding silence falls over Vic!
VIC, WHAT ARE YOU THINKING?
OF SZZZ, LAURA, AND ALL THE TERROR AND EVIL HE'S WROUGHT! I CAN'T GET HIM OUT OF MY MIND! I CAN'T STOP THINKING!...


VIC, WE'RE CHANGING COURSE! WE'RE HEADING BACK TO MERCURY! WHY, VIC? -- SPEAK TO ME!...
WHY HAS THE SPACESHIP BEEN SUDDENLY REVERSED TOWARD MERCURY? HAS THE EVIL SPELL OF SZZZ REACHED INTO SPACE AND LAID ITS HANDS ON VIC? READ CHAPTER THREE FOR THE STARTLING ANSWER!

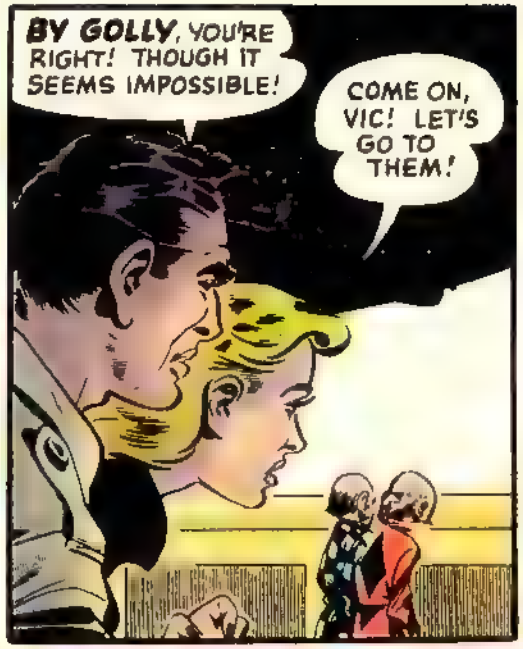
CATASTROPHE!

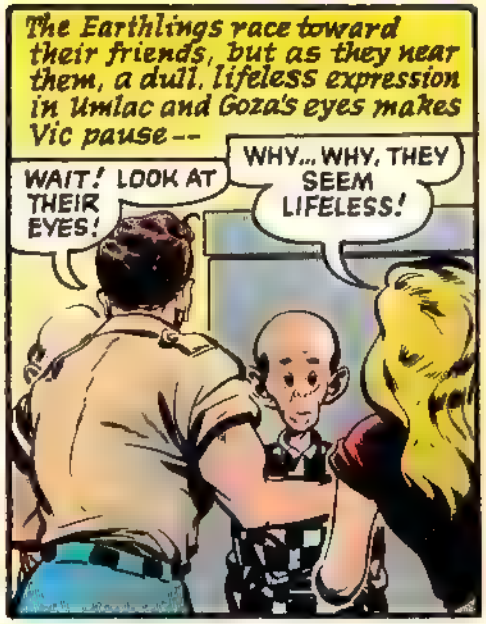
Chapter Three

VIC *and* **LAURA** return to the captive planet, Mercury, and there begins the fantastic adventure which is to bring them both under the --- **EVIL SPELL OF SZZZ!**

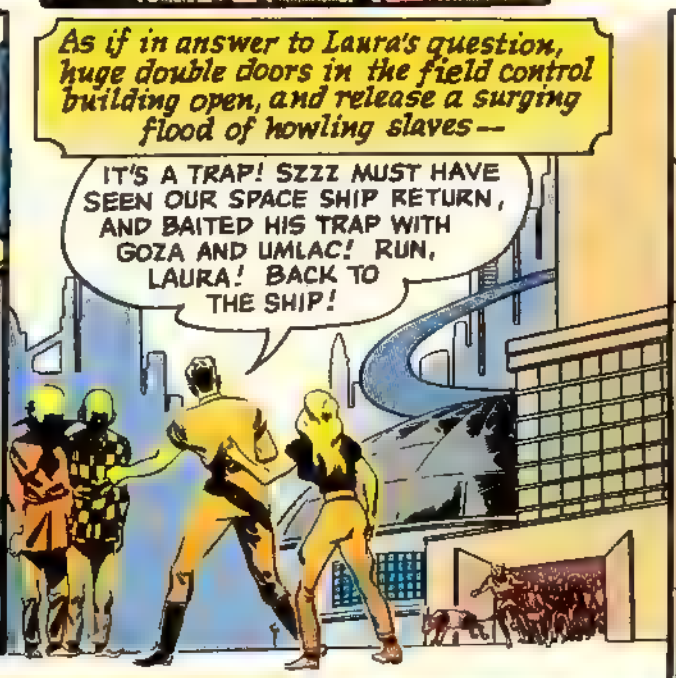


Landing on the field where they'd seen Umlac and Goza, Vic and Laura step cautiously from the Ship, alert for trouble...
THERE'S NOT A SOUL AROUND. THE FIELD'S DESERTED!
VIC! LOOK! IT'S UMLAC AND GOZA!

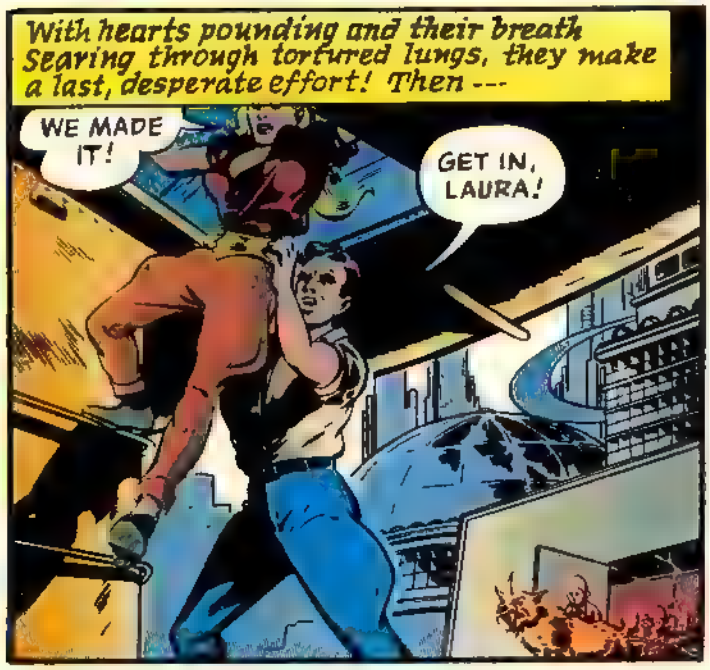

BY GOLLY, YOU'RE RIGHT! THOUGH IT SEEMS IMPOSSIBLE!
COME ON, VIC! LET'S GO TO THEM!

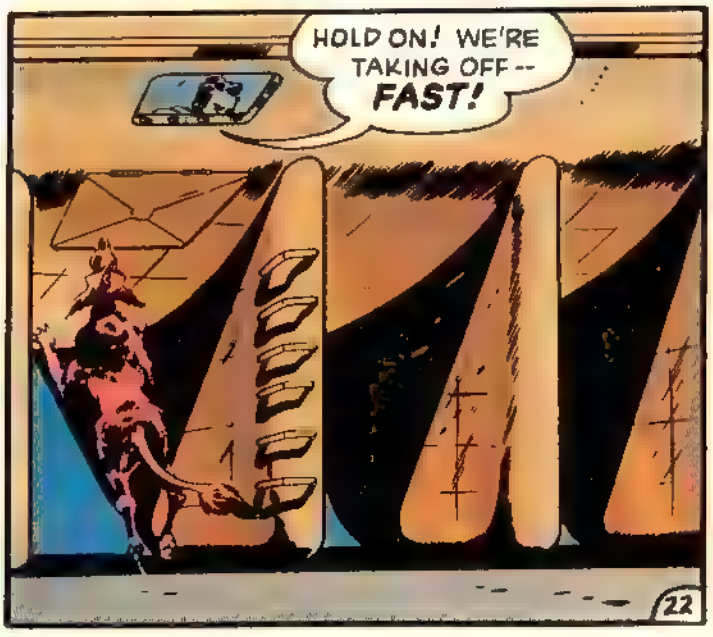

The Earthlings race toward their friends, but as they near them, a dull, lifeless expression in Umlac and Goza's eyes makes Vic pause --
WAIT! LOOK AT THEIR EYES!
WHY... WHY, THEY SEEM LIFELESS!

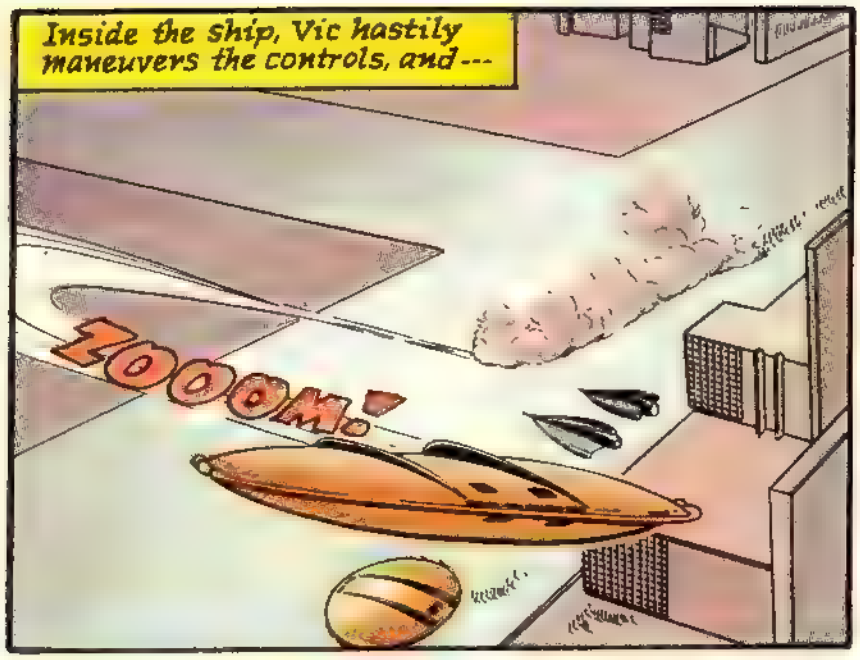
THEY'RE LIKE THE OTHERS! SZZZ CONTROLS THEIR FACULTIES. THEY'RE HIS CREATURES NOW!
B-BUT WHY ARE THEY HERE?


As if in answer to Laura's question, huge double doors in the field control building open, and release a surging flood of howling slaves --
IT'S A TRAP! SZZZ MUST HAVE SEEN OUR SPACE SHIP RETURN, AND BAITED HIS TRAP WITH GOZA AND UMLAC! RUN, LAURA! BACK TO THE SHIP!

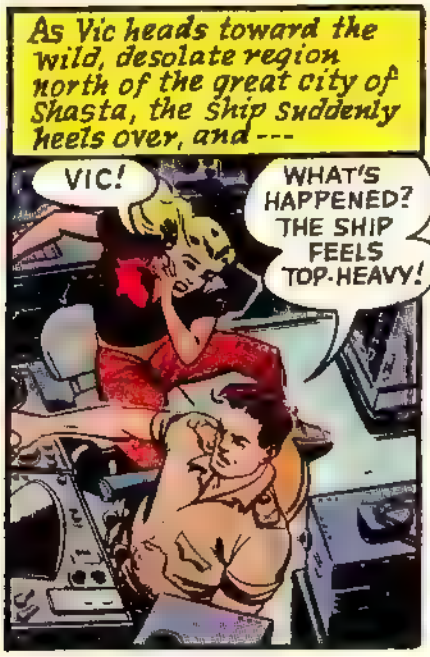
IF WE CAN MEET IT, WE'VE GOT A CHANCE! RUN, LAURA, RUN!

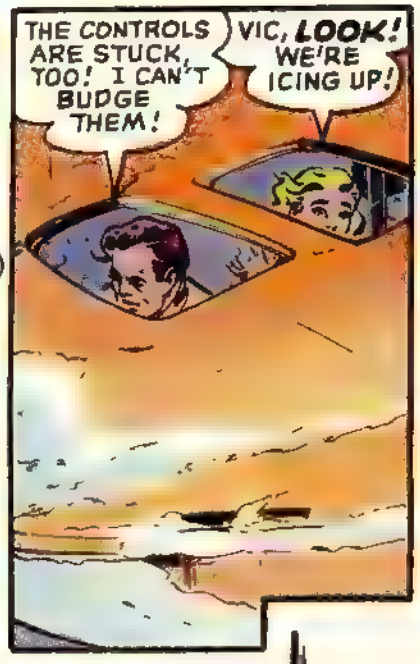

With hearts pounding and their breath searing through tortured lungs, they make a last, desperate effort! Then ---
WE MADE IT!
GET IN, LAURA!


HOLD ON! WE'RE TAKING OFF -- FAST!

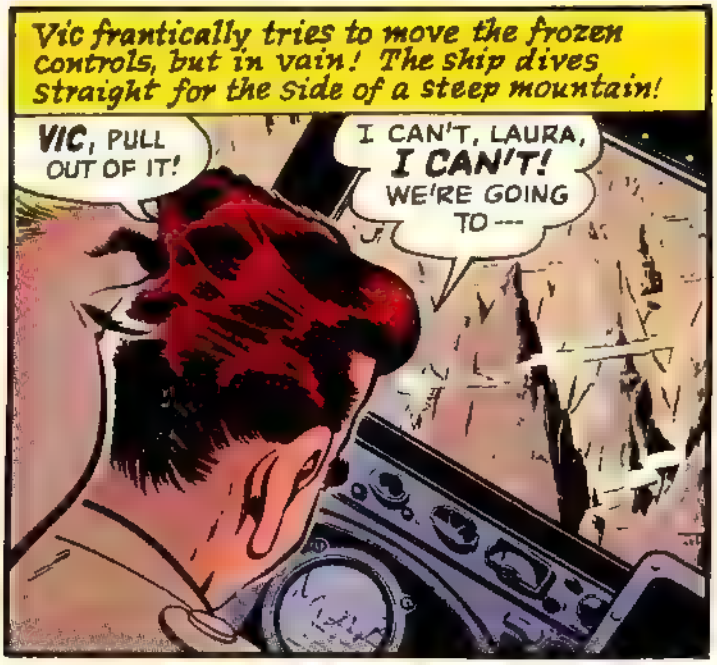

Inside the ship, Vic hastily maneuvers the controls, and---
ZOOOM!

IT WAS AWFUL, SEEING UMLAC AND GOZA LIKE ALL THE REST OF SZZZ'S SLAVES! OH, VIC, WHAT'RE WE GOING TO DO NOW?
HEAD FOR THAT BROKEN-UP CANYON COUNTRY OUTSIDE THE CITY! WE'LL HIDE OUT THERE UNTIL WE CAN FIGURE OUT SOME WAY TO GET TO SZZZ!

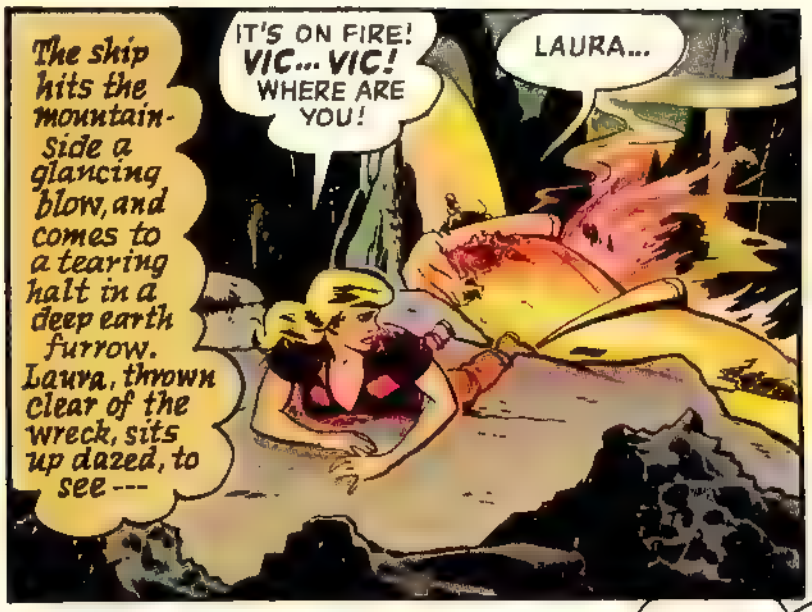

As Vic heads toward the wild, desolate region north of the great city of Shasta, the ship suddenly heels over, and---
VIC!
WHAT'S HAPPENED? THE SHIP FEELS TOP-HEAVY!

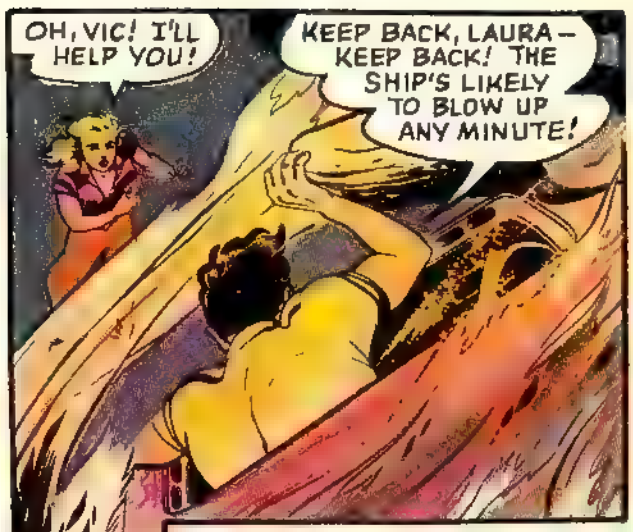

THE CONTROLS ARE STUCK, TOO! I CAN'T BUDGE THEM!
VIC, LOOK! WE'RE ICING UP!

IT CAN'T BE! WE'RE NOT HIGH--! SAY, THAT IS ICE, AND IT'S FORCING US DOWN! WE'RE LOSING ALTITUDE--FAST!
SZZZ MUST BE CAUSING THIS! HE'S FOUND A WAY TO STOP US!

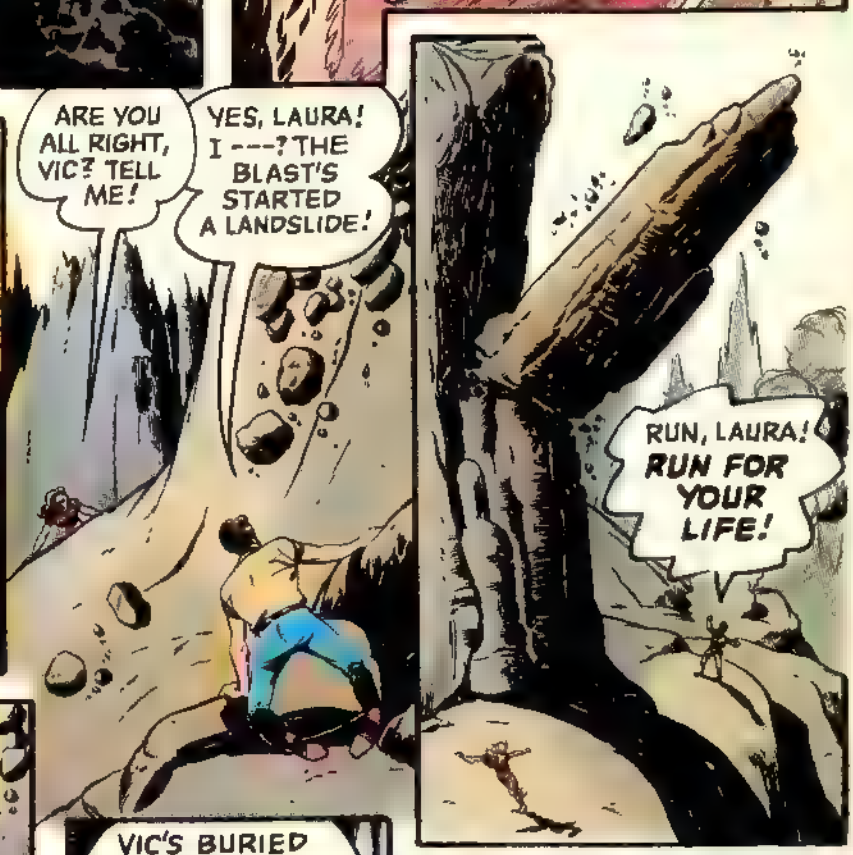

Vic frantically tries to move the frozen controls, but in vain! The ship dives straight for the side of a steep mountain!
VIC, PULL OUT OF IT!
I CAN'T, LAURA, I CAN'T! WE'RE GOING TO---

CRASH!


The ship hits the mountain-side a glancing blow, and comes to a tearing halt in a deep earth furrow. Laura, thrown clear of the wreck, sits up dazed, to see ---
IT'S ON FIRE! VIC... VIC! WHERE ARE YOU!
LAURA...

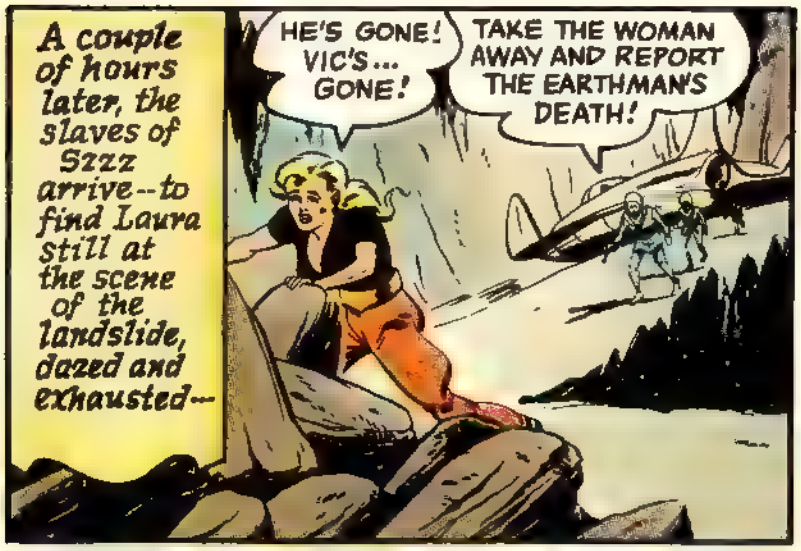

OH, VIC! I'LL HELP YOU!
KEEP BACK, LAURA – KEEP BACK! THE SHIP'S LIKELY TO BLOW UP ANY MINUTE!

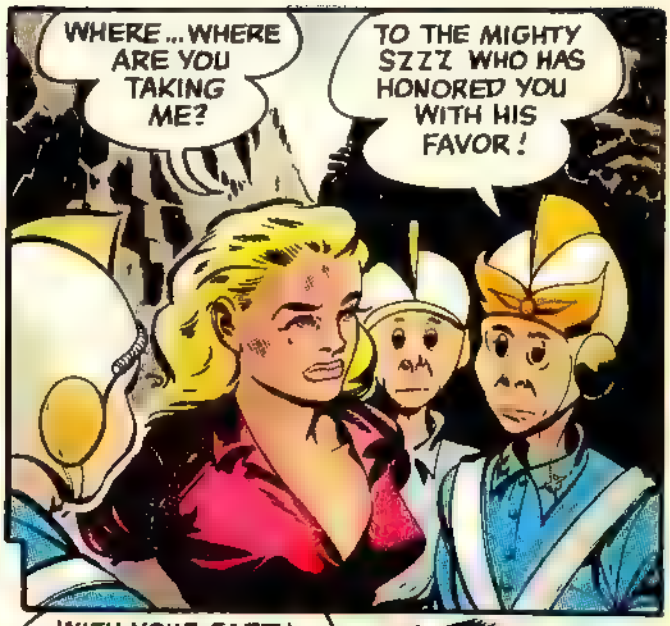
Staggering from the blazing wreckage, Vic heads away from the ship! Then---
BOOM!


ARE YOU ALL RIGHT, VIC? TELL ME!
YES, LAURA! I ---? THE BLAST'S STARTED A LANDSLIDE!
RUN, LAURA! RUN FOR YOUR LIFE!

With awful, terrifying reverberation, the whole side of the mountain COLLAPSES!
I'VE GOT TO MAKE IT INTO THAT CLIFF HOLLOW!

VIC'S BURIED UNDER THAT! OH, VIC -- SOB -- VIC, DARLING!


A couple of hours later, the slaves of Szzz arrive--to find Laura still at the scene of the landslide, dazed and exhausted--
HE'S GONE! VIC'S... GONE!
TAKE THE WOMAN AWAY AND REPORT THE EARTHMAN'S DEATH!


WHERE...WHERE ARE YOU TAKING ME?
TO THE MIGHTY SZZZ WHO HAS HONORED YOU WITH HIS FAVOR!

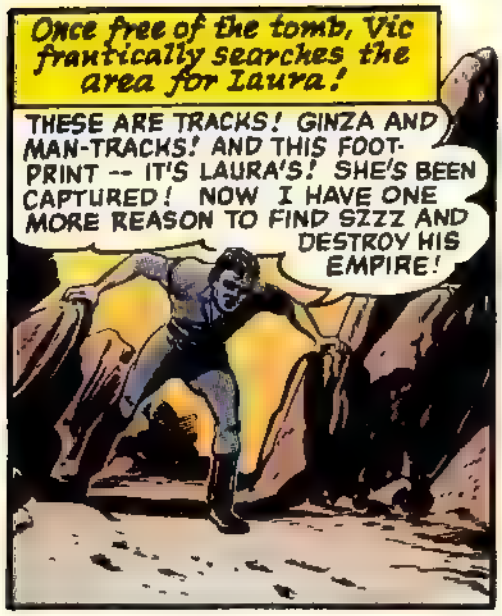
Sometime later, Laura is brought before the evil tyrant at his secret headquarters---
YOU ARE TRULY BEAUTIFUL—AND A FITTING QUEEN FOR ALL OF MERCURY! TOGETHER, WE SHALL RULE THE UNIVERSE!
YOU MEAN...? NO! NO! BEAST! MURDERER!

WITH YOUR EARTHMAN DEAD, AND ALL MERCURY IN MY POWER, YOU HAVE NO ALTERNATIVE BUT TO ACCEPT MY WILL! I WILL ASSIGN YOU SLAVES TO OBEY YOUR EVERY WISH!

UMLAC! GOZA!
THEY DO NOT RECOGNIZE YOU, MY DEAR! THEY ARE MINDLESS CATTLE LIKE ALL THE REST! THIS IS YOUR MISTRESS, SLAVES! OBEY HER EVERY WHIM!

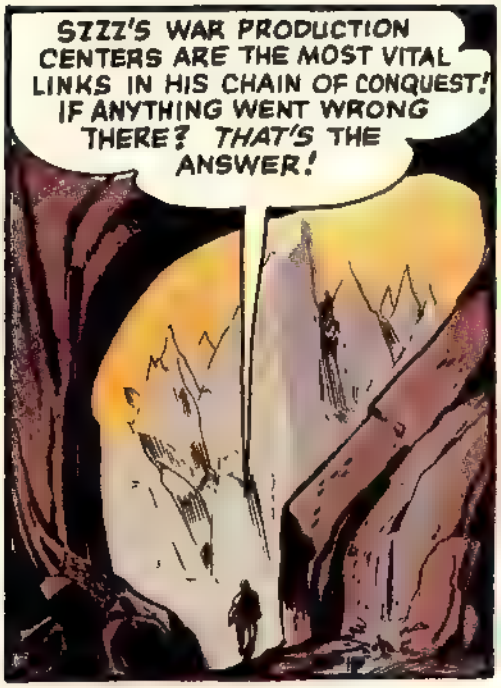
Meanwhile, back at the mountain, Vic has been entombed in the hollow of the cliff where he took refuge. After hours of digging with his bare hands...
LIGHT, AND BLESSED FRESH AIR! I'M GOING TO MAKE IT! I'LL ESCAPE THIS TOMB!

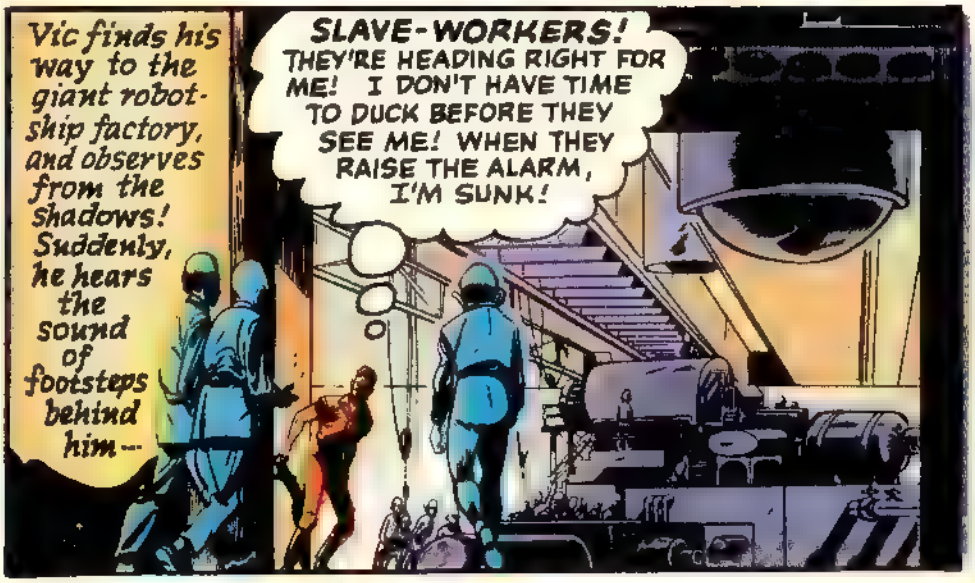
THERE! NOW TO FIND LAURA!


Once free of the tomb, Vic frantically searches the area for Laura!
THESE ARE TRACKS! GINZA AND MAN-TRACKS! AND THIS FOOT-PRINT -- IT'S LAURA'S! SHE'S BEEN CAPTURED! NOW I HAVE ONE MORE REASON TO FIND SZZZ AND DESTROY HIS EMPIRE!

I'M ALONE NOW! MILLIONS OF LIVES DEPEND ON ME! I MUST FIND A WAY TO DEFEAT SZZZ AND RESCUE LAURA!

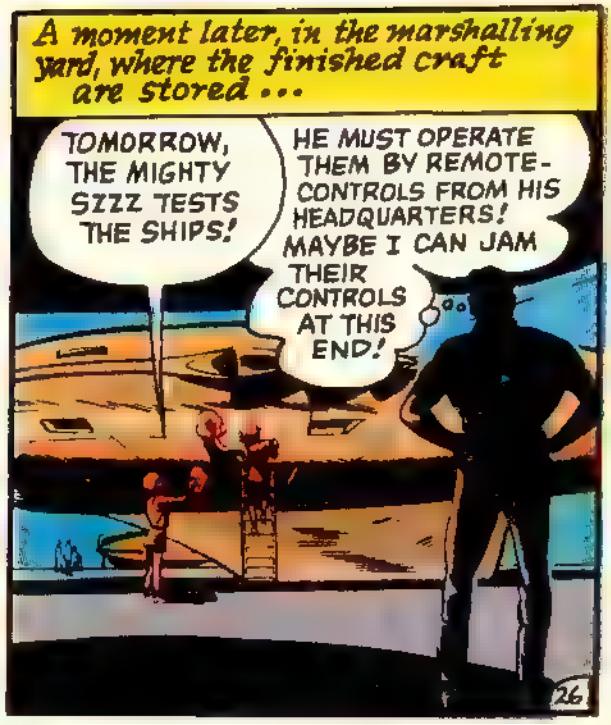
HOW CAN I LOCATE SZZZ'S HEADQUARTERS? GOZA AND UMLAC SAID HE NEVER LEAVES IT! IF I COULD MAKE HIM LEAVE IT, THOUGH, FORCE HIM INTO THE OPEN ---

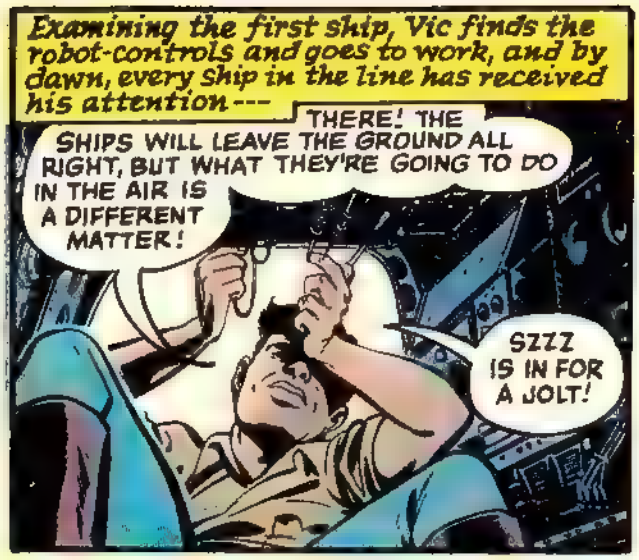

SZZZ'S WAR PRODUCTION CENTERS ARE THE MOST VITAL LINKS IN HIS CHAIN OF CONQUEST! IF ANYTHING WENT WRONG THERE? THAT'S THE ANSWER!

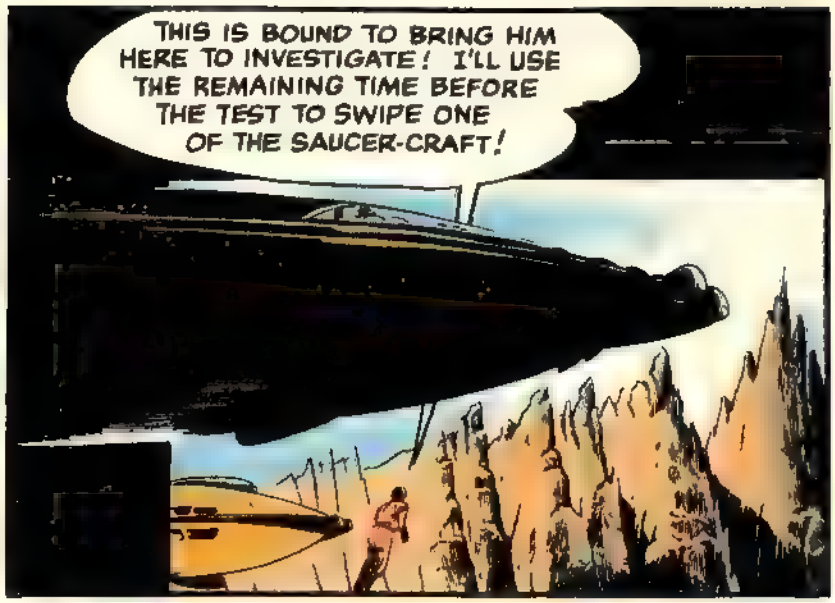

Vic finds his way to the giant robot-ship factory, and observes from the shadows! Suddenly, he hears the sound of footsteps behind him --
SLAVE-WORKERS! THEY'RE HEADING RIGHT FOR ME! I DON'T HAVE TIME TO DUCK BEFORE THEY SEE ME! WHEN THEY RAISE THE ALARM, I'M SUNK!

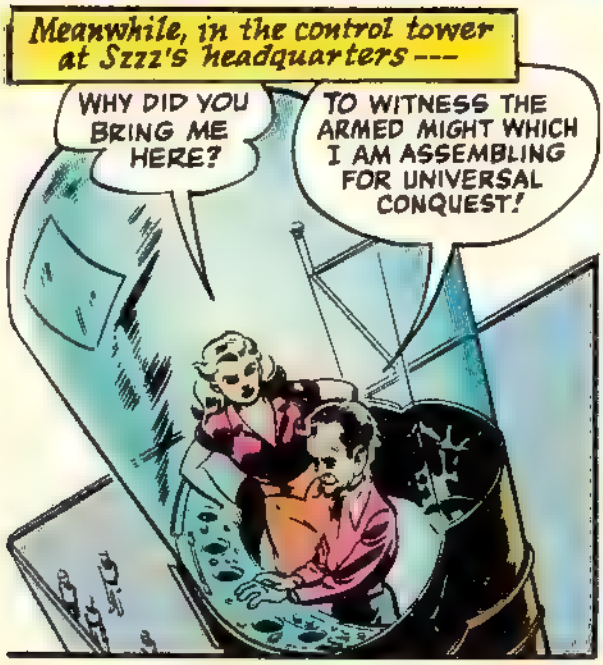
BUT THEY DON'T EVEN SEE ME! OF COURSE! SZZZ THINKS I WAS KILLED IN THE SLIDE -- AND HE DIRECTED THEIR THOUGHTS ELSEWHERE!

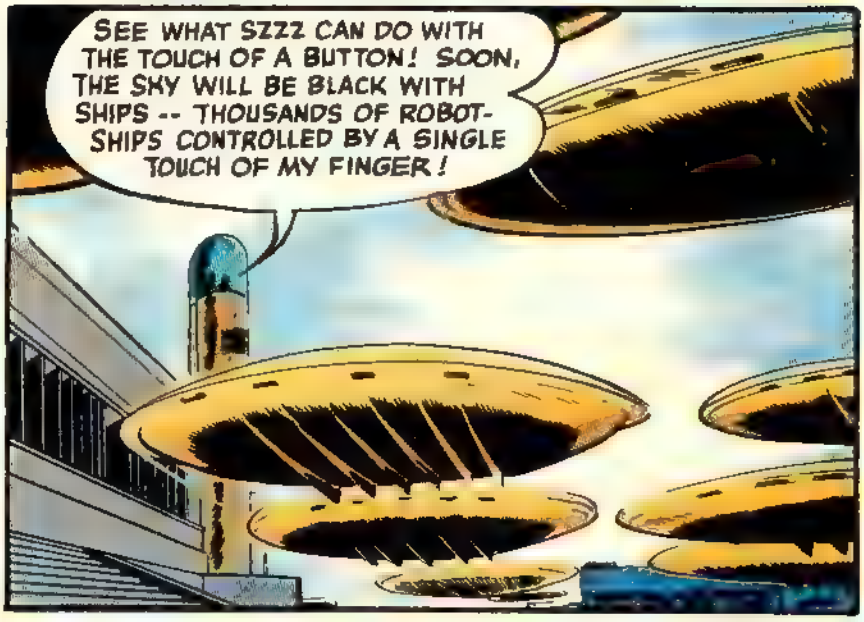
AT LAST, I'VE DISCOVERED SZZZ'S WEAK SPOT -- THE SLAVES! I CAN MOVE BOLDLY AMONG THEM, YET BE UNOBSERVED! THROUGH THEM, I CAN STRIKE AT HIM!

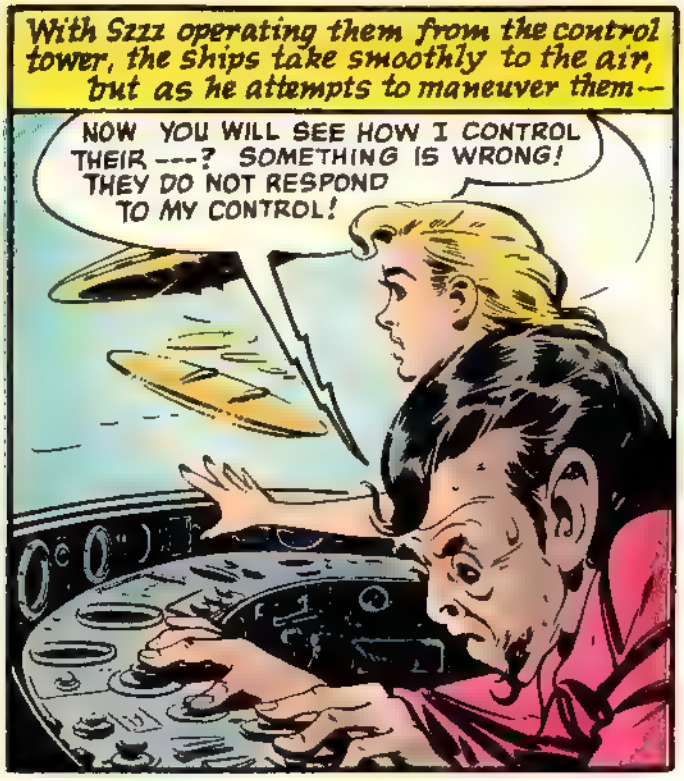

A moment later, in the marshalling yard, where the finished craft are stored ...
TOMORROW, THE MIGHTY SZZZ TESTS THE SHIPS!
HE MUST OPERATE THEM BY REMOTE-CONTROLS FROM HIS HEADQUARTERS! MAYBE I CAN JAM THEIR CONTROLS AT THIS END!


Examining the first ship, Vic finds the robot-controls and goes to work, and by dawn, every ship in the line has received his attention---
THERE! THE SHIPS WILL LEAVE THE GROUND ALL RIGHT, BUT WHAT THEY'RE GOING TO DO IN THE AIR IS A DIFFERENT MATTER!
SZZZ IS IN FOR A JOLT!

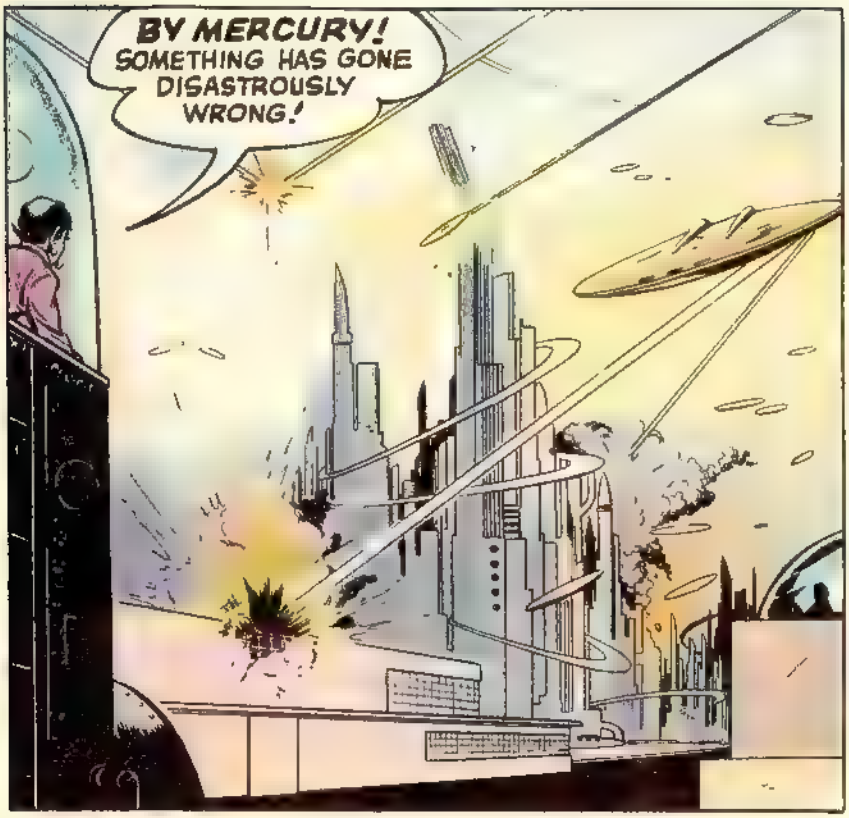

THIS IS BOUND TO BRING HIM HERE TO INVESTIGATE! I'LL USE THE REMAINING TIME BEFORE THE TEST TO SWIPE ONE OF THE SAUCER-CRAFT!


Meanwhile, in the control tower at Szzz's headquarters---
WHY DID YOU BRING ME HERE?
TO WITNESS THE ARMED MIGHT WHICH I AM ASSEMBLING FOR UNIVERSAL CONQUEST!

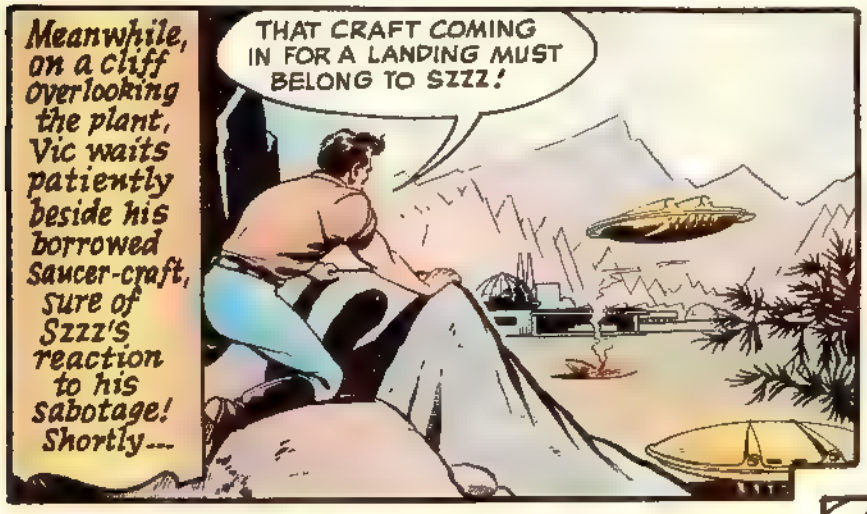

SEE WHAT SZZZ CAN DO WITH THE TOUCH OF A BUTTON! SOON, THE SKY WILL BE BLACK WITH SHIPS -- THOUSANDS OF ROBOT-SHIPS CONTROLLED BY A SINGLE TOUCH OF MY FINGER!

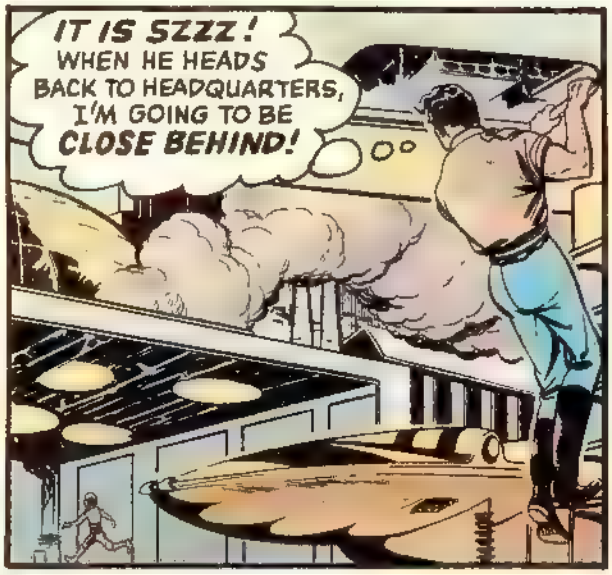

With Szzz operating them from the control tower, the ships take smoothly to the air, but as he attempts to maneuver them--
NOW YOU WILL SEE HOW I CONTROL THEIR ---? SOMETHING IS WRONG! THEY DO NOT RESPOND TO MY CONTROL!

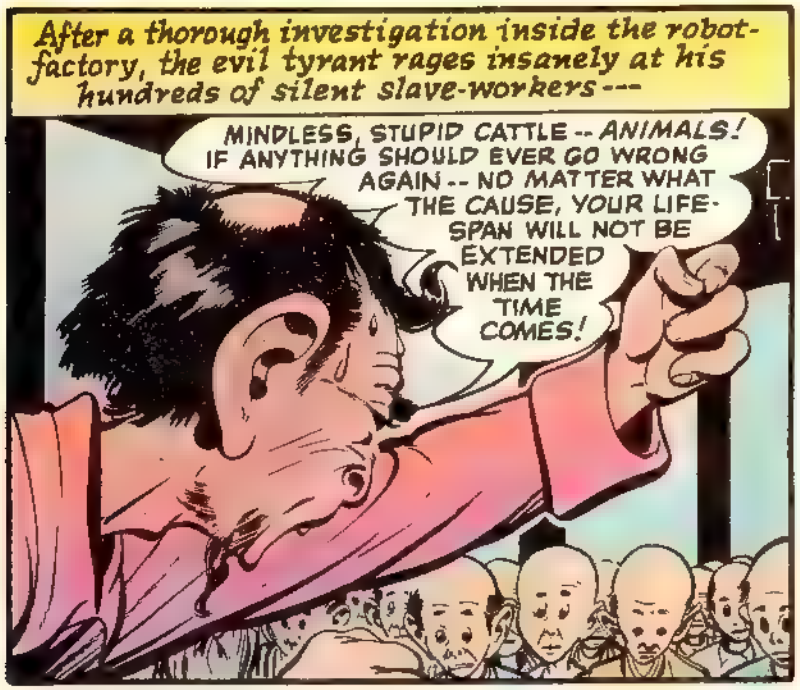
CRASH!

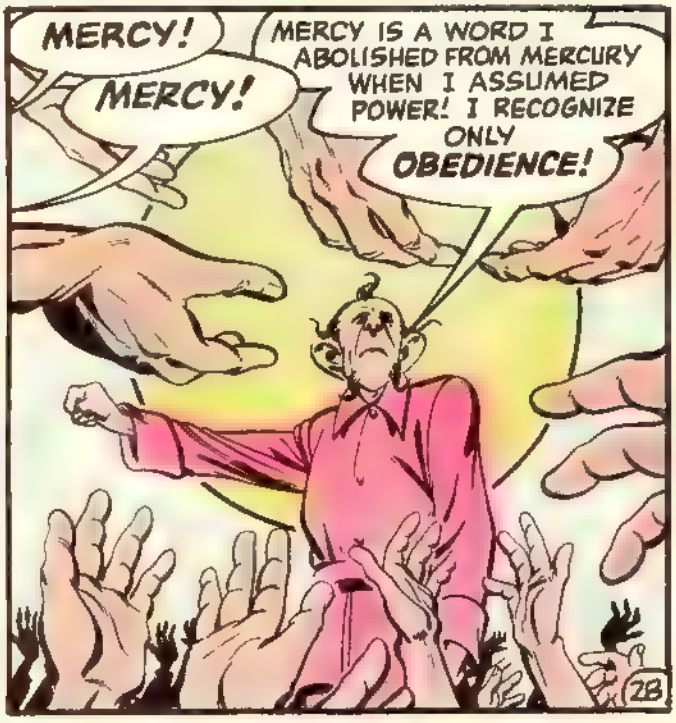

BY MERCURY! SOMETHING HAS GONE DISASTROUSLY WRONG!

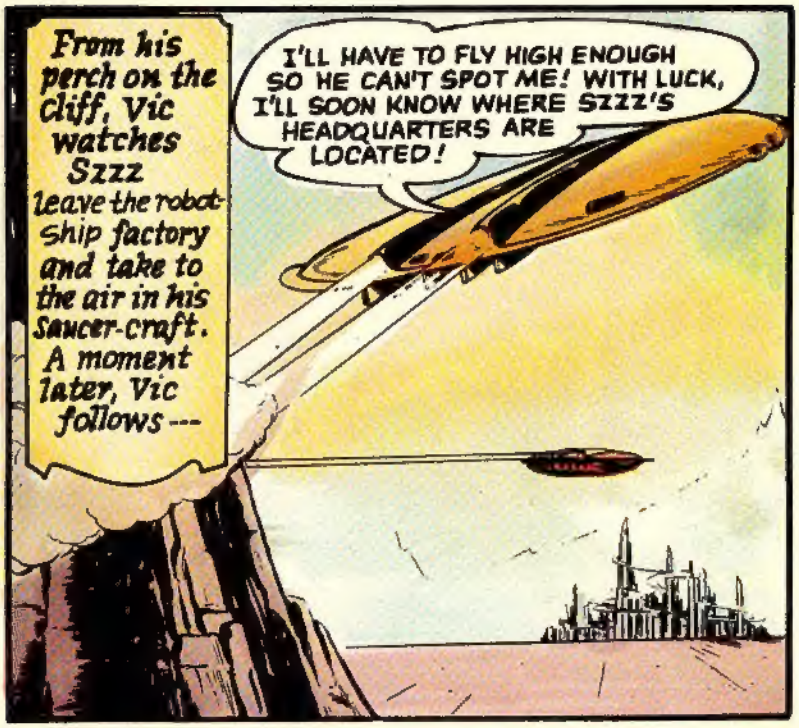
PREPARE MY SHIP FOR A JOURNEY, SLAVES! I LEAVE ON AN INSPECTION TOUR OF THE ROBOT-SHIP FACTORY! QUICKLY!


Meanwhile, on a cliff overlooking the plant, Vic waits patiently beside his borrowed saucer-craft, sure of Szzz's reaction to his sabotage! Shortly---
THAT CRAFT COMING IN FOR A LANDING MUST BELONG TO SZZZ!

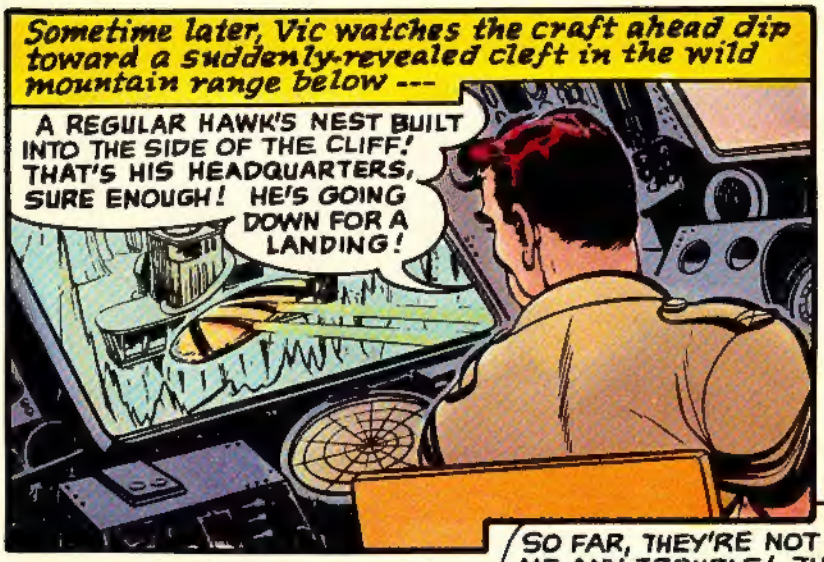

IT IS SZZZ! WHEN HE HEADS BACK TO HEADQUARTERS, I'M GOING TO BE CLOSE BEHIND!

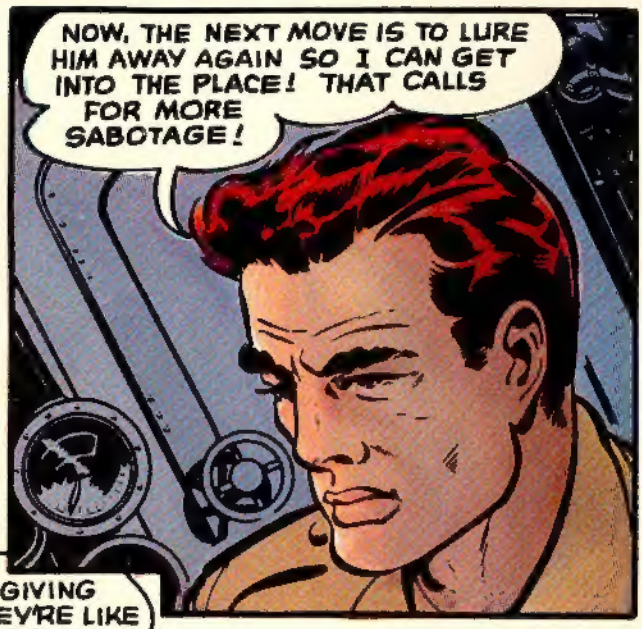

After a thorough investigation inside the robot-factory, the evil tyrant rages insanely at his hundreds of silent slave-workers---
MINDLESS, STUPID CATTLE -- ANIMALS! IF ANYTHING SHOULD EVER GO WRONG AGAIN -- NO MATTER WHAT THE CAUSE, YOUR LIFE-SPAN WILL NOT BE EXTENDED WHEN THE TIME COMES!


MERCY!
MERCY!
MERCY IS A WORD I ABOLISHED FROM MERCURY WHEN I ASSUMED POWER! I RECOGNIZE ONLY OBEDIENCE!


From his perch on the cliff, Vic watches Szzz leave the robot-ship factory and take to the air in his saucer-craft. A moment later, Vic follows ---
I'LL HAVE TO FLY HIGH ENOUGH SO HE CAN'T SPOT ME! WITH LUCK, I'LL SOON KNOW WHERE SZZZ'S HEADQUARTERS ARE LOCATED!

LAURA IS A PRISONER THERE, AND THE SECRET OF HIS CONTROL OVER HIS MILLIONS OF SLAVES -- A SECRET THAT MAY FREE THEM IF I CAN LEARN IT!

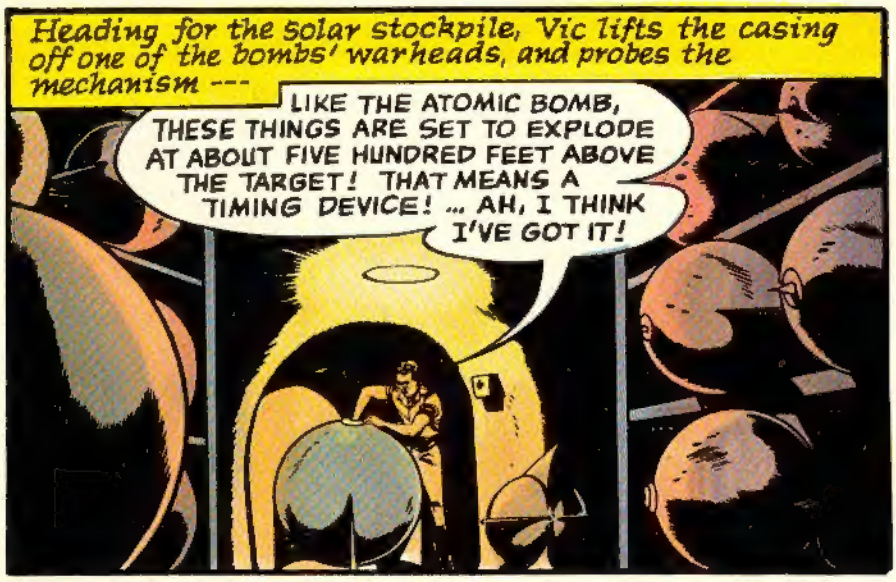

Sometime later, Vic watches the craft ahead dip toward a suddenly-revealed cleft in the wild mountain range below ---
A REGULAR HAWK'S NEST BUILT INTO THE SIDE OF THE CLIFF! THAT'S HIS HEADQUARTERS, SURE ENOUGH! HE'S GOING DOWN FOR A LANDING!


NOW, THE NEXT MOVE IS TO LURE HIM AWAY AGAIN SO I CAN GET INTO THE PLACE! THAT CALLS FOR MORE SABOTAGE!

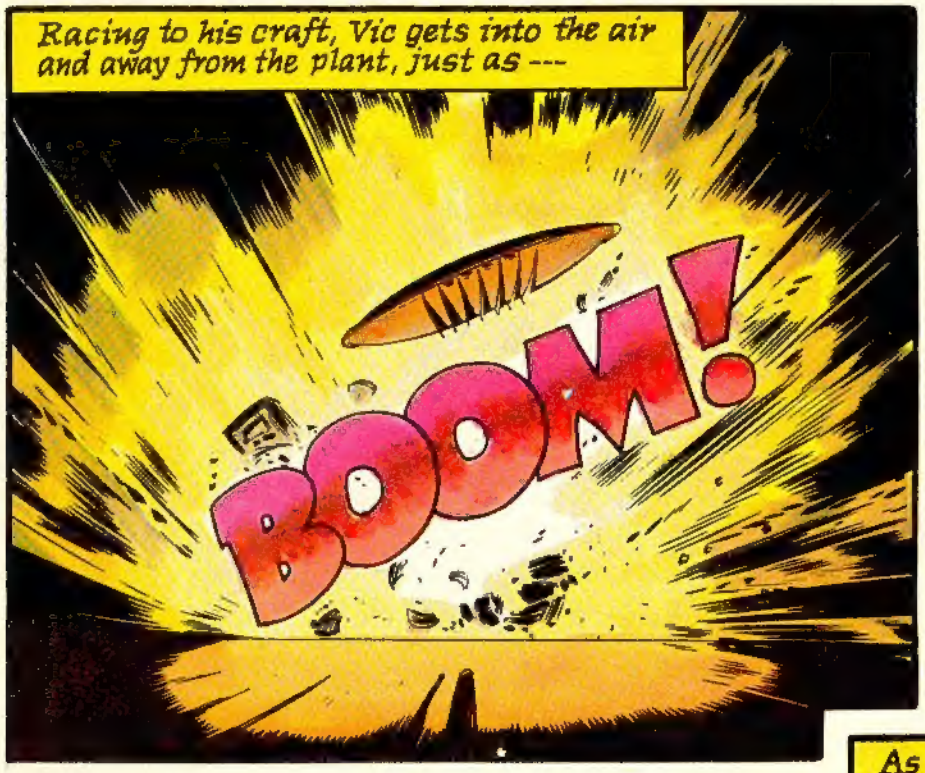
Later, at the tyrant's huge solar-energy plant, where the most destructive bomb in the universe is created, the SOLAR-BOMB ---
NOW TO GET THE SLAVES OUT OF RANGE! I CAN MANAGE THAT BY ROUNDING THEM UP AND GETTING THEM HEADED ON A STRAIGHT LINE AWAY FROM THE PLANT! I DON'T WANT TO KILL THEM!

SO FAR, THEY'RE NOT GIVING ME ANY TROUBLE! THEY'RE LIKE SHEEP, ONE FOLLOWING THE OTHER, WITHOUT THOUGHT OR QUESTION!

As the slave-workers begin moving away from the plant under Vic's direction, other workers drop their tools and stolidly join their companions! Soon ---
THERE! NOW I CAN GET ON WITH THE JOB!


Heading for the solar stockpile, Vic lifts the casing off one of the bombs' warheads, and probes the mechanism ---
LIKE THE ATOMIC BOMB, THESE THINGS ARE SET TO EXPLODE AT ABOUT FIVE HUNDRED FEET ABOVE THE TARGET! THAT MEANS A TIMING DEVICE! ... AH, I THINK I'VE GOT IT!

THERE! THE BOMB'S ACTIVATED NOW! I CAN HEAR THE MECHANISM WHIRRING! NOW TO GET OUT OF HERE BEFORE THE WHOLE PLACE BLOWS SKY-HIGH!


Racing to his craft, Vic gets into the air and away from the plant, just as ---
BOOM!

Even at Szzz's headquarters, the tremendous blast is felt ---
WHA--?
RUMBLE--
BOOM!

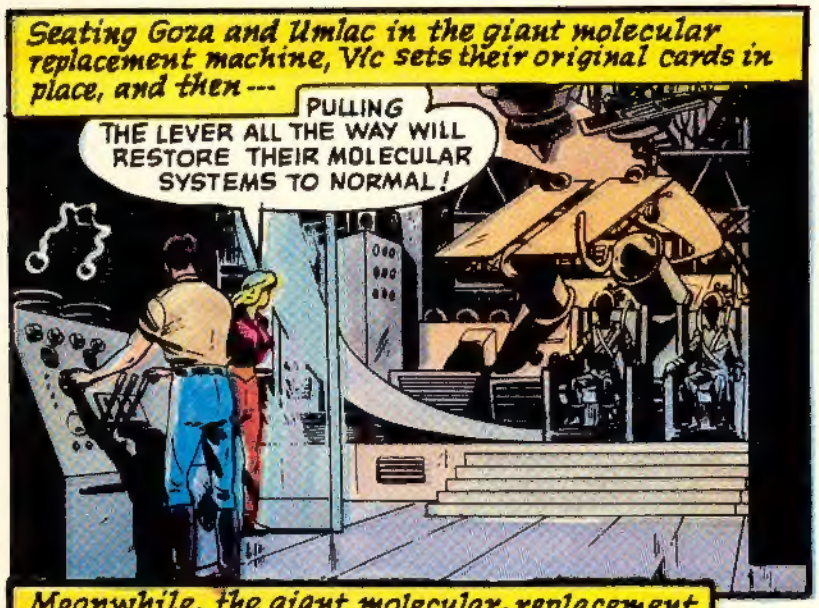
THERE HAS BEEN AN EXPLOSION AT THE SOLAR-PLANT! MY SHIP, FOOLS! PREPARE MY SHIP!

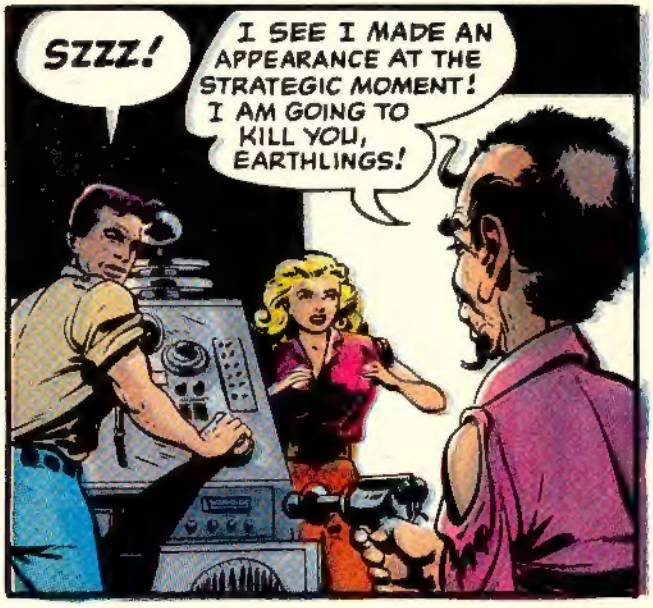
As Szzz leaves his headquarters, there's an interested observer high above the hidden valley ---
THAT BROUGHT HIM OUT ALL RIGHT! NOW TO GET DOWN THERE AND ENTER HIS HEADQUARTERS!

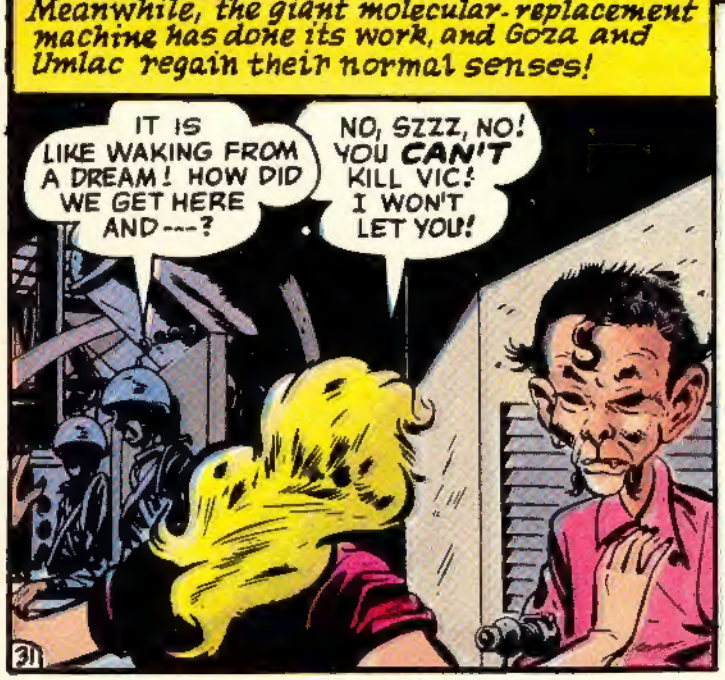
Landing his craft on the terrace, Vic enters Szzz's headquarters to see ---
VIC! OH, VIC, I--I THOUGHT YOU WERE DEAD!

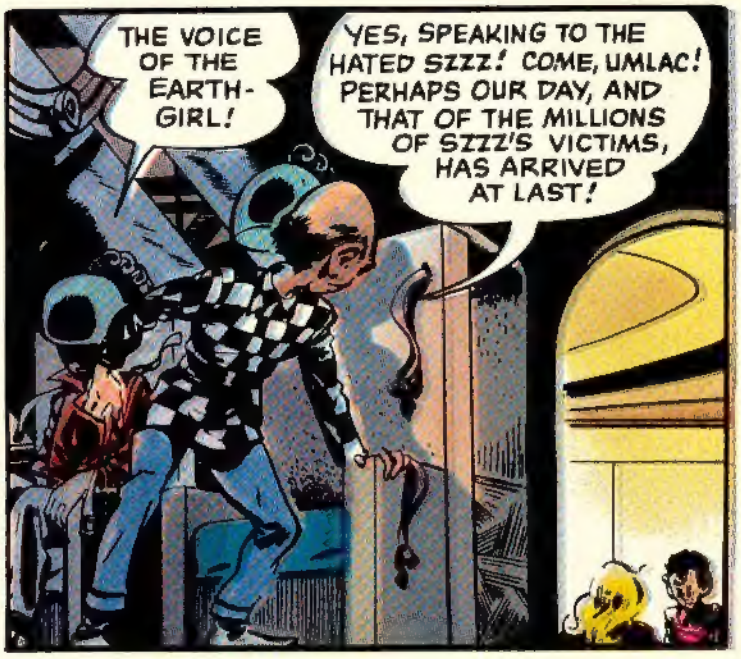
DARLING, THERE'S NO TIME TO TALK NOW! I'VE GOT TO GET TO SZZZ'S CONTROL ROOM!
VIC, I KNOW EVERYTHING! THE MOLECULAR MACHINE AND THE MOLECULAR SYSTEMS OF EVERYONE ON MERCURY ARE HERE! WE CAN USE THEM TO FREE THE PLANET!

COME, VIC, I'LL SHOW YOU!
WAIT! GOZA! UMLAC! THEY'RE HERE ALSO! LAURA, WE'LL TAKE THEM ALONG! GET THEIR RECORDED SYSTEMS OUT OF THE FILES FIRST!


Seating Goza and Umlac in the giant molecular replacement machine, Vic sets their original cards in place, and then ---
PULLING THE LEVER ALL THE WAY WILL RESTORE THEIR MOLECULAR SYSTEMS TO NORMAL!


SZZZ!
I SEE I MADE AN APPEARANCE AT THE STRATEGIC MOMENT! I AM GOING TO KILL YOU, EARTHLINGS!


Meanwhile, the giant molecular-replacement machine has done its work, and Goza and Umlac regain their normal senses!
IT IS LIKE WAKING FROM A DREAM! HOW DID WE GET HERE AND ---?
NO, SZZZ, NO! YOU CAN'T KILL VIC! I WON'T LET YOU!

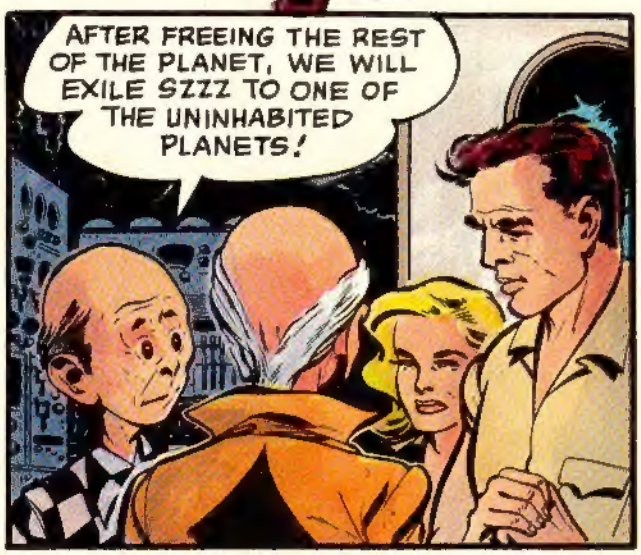

THE VOICE OF THE EARTH-GIRL!
YES, SPEAKING TO THE HATED SZZZ! COME, UMLAC! PERHAPS OUR DAY, AND THAT OF THE MILLIONS OF SZZZ'S VICTIMS, HAS ARRIVED AT LAST!

In the room outside, Szzz raises his atomicgrator, his face twisted with evil triumph, his finger tightening on the trigger ---
NOW, EARTHLING, YOUR END IS AT HAND!
STOP!

GOZA! UMLAC! WHAT--?
THIS IS THE OPENING I'VE BEEN WAITING FOR!

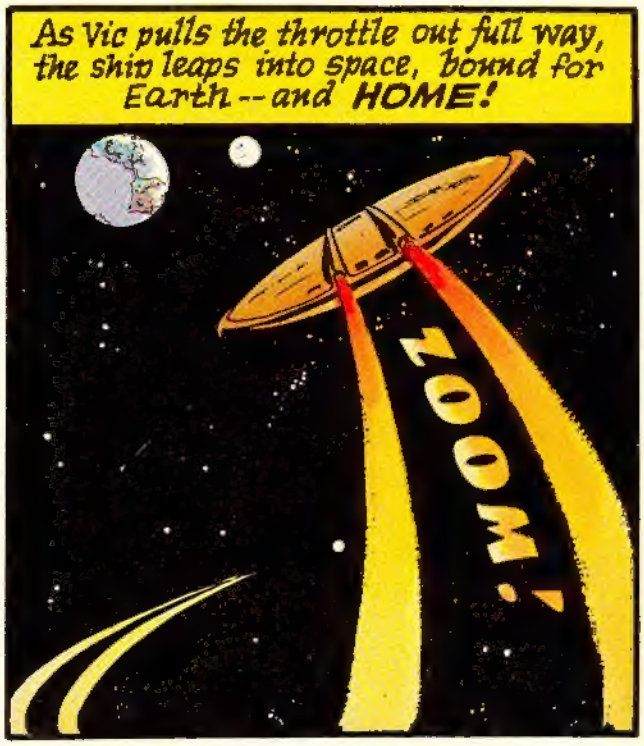
POW!

THAT PUTS AN END TO SZZZ AND HIS EVIL DREAM OF SOLAR CONQUEST! NOW THERE'LL BE A FREE MERCURY AND SOMEDAY, A UNITED PLANETS, DEDICATED TO ETERNAL PEACE!


AFTER FREEING THE REST OF THE PLANET, WE WILL EXILE SZZZ TO ONE OF THE UNINHABITED PLANETS!

Szzz is sent into exile and all Mercury is released from his evil spell. Shortly thereafter, in a new spaceship, presented to them by the Mercurians, Vic and Laura prepare to return to Earth!
GOODBYE, EARTHLINGS, AND GOOD JOURNEY! DON'T FORGET THE UNITED PLANETS ORGANIZATION WE ARE WORKING TOWARDS! SOMEDAY SOON, EARTH WILL BE READY TO TAKE ITS PLACE AMONG US!
WE WON'T FORGET! GOODBYE, GOZA, UMLAC! GOODBYE, MERCURY!

THIS IS IT, LAURA! TAKE YOUR LAST LOOK AT MERCURY! WE'LL BE LEAVING IT BEHIND IN A MOMENT!
BUT NOT ITS MEMORIES, VIC! I'LL ALWAYS REMEMBER THE ADVENTURES WE WENT THROUGH, AND PRAY THAT NEVER AGAIN WILL A TYRANT LIKE SZZZ RISE TO ENSLAVE A FREE WORLD!


As Vic pulls the throttle out full way, the ship leaps into space, bound for Earth -- and HOME!
ZOOM!